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Miss W Steciuk
St Philip Howard Catholic School
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Dear Miss Steciuk

Ofsted monitoring of schools with a notice to improve

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 28 May 2010 and for the information which you provided during my visit. Please pass on my thanks to the chair of governors' teaching and learning committee, local authority representative, staff and students who gave up their time to talk to me.

Since the last inspection, new heads of science and design and technology have taken up their posts and a new deputy headteacher and business manager have been appointed.

As a result of the inspection on 30 September 2009, the school was asked to focus on five key issues. The first was to ensure that the equal opportunities policy meets statutory requirements so that:

- sources of information are clearly identified to support a review of equalities, action plans are devised to tackle equality priorities and outcomes are reported and used to inform subsequent work.

The second key issue focused on improving the school's systems for monitoring progress so that:

- students are able to achieve challenging targets through collection and analysis of information, students at risk of not meeting their targets are identified and intervention strategies are implemented to get students back on track.

The third key issue focused on improving lines of accountability between senior and middle leaders so that:

- there are improvements in the monitoring of teaching and learning



- all staff make better use of progress information to identify students' learning needs
- checks on all aspects of the school's work are undertaken
- the governing body has sufficient understanding of the school's work.

The fourth key issue focused on increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:

- ensuring teachers take account of prior attainment, assessment information and the learning needs of students
- using questioning more effectively, ensure all students contribute in lessons and use teaching methods that provide interest and challenge for all abilities
- checking students' understanding of their work more frequently in lessons.

The fifth key issue asked the school to broaden the Key Stage 4 curriculum by extending the number of vocational courses and setting up more effective links with local providers.

This monitoring visit considered how the school has improved since the September 2009 inspection. The inspector observed six lessons jointly with the headteacher, spoke to a number of staff concerning the above issues and spoke to consultants, members of the governing body and students. The arrangements for the safeguarding of students were also checked and found to be secure.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising students' achievement.

Since the previous inspection, the school's tracking and monitoring information clearly shows that standards in English and mathematics continue to improve. Importantly, the school is becoming effective in ensuring more vulnerable pupils achieve their potential in the key areas of English and mathematics. The proportion of Year 11 students predicted to gain five GCSE A* to C is predicted to be just under 60%, an improvement on the previous year.

The school now has in place an equal opportunities policy that is being implemented effectively and is at the forefront of the school's work. Senior leaders are systematically tracking the progress of all groups of students and there is a specific focus on the most vulnerable groups. They have a very clear picture of those students who are not fulfilling their potential. The learning needs of these students is being addressed through the implementation of strategies such as coaching, one-to-one support and personalised intervention plans, overseen by heads of departments and key stage managers. Teachers' planning demonstrates that they are much more aware of these students, and their lesson planning has a clearer focus on support



and strategies to help these students. The improvement in monitoring is also providing the senior leaders with a much clearer picture of participation rates in clubs and this is enabling the school to tackle inequalities.

Middle leaders have undergone training and this has resulted in a much more rigorous approach to the monitoring of teaching and learning. Communication between senior staff and middle leaders has improved considerably. The introduction of faculties has provided the school with much clearer lines of communication and subject leaders and middle managers now know to whom they are responsible. Following the last inspection, the governing body recognised the need to become more aware of the issues facing the school and to become more accountable for improving its provision. It has implemented a single equalities policy and action plan and undertaken much training. It is actively involved in producing the school development plan and in the school's self-evaluation. As a consequence, it is now in a much better position to challenge and hold the school to account.

Lessons demonstrate that teachers are taking much greater account of the students' prior learning when planning lessons. Assessments are undertaken more frequently than at the time of the previous inspection and this information is used by senior staff to set targets. All lessons observed during the monitoring visit were at least good and one was outstanding. Lessons observations show teachers are now planning work for students of different abilities. Much greater note is being taken of the needs of vulnerable groups and teaching assistants are playing an increasingly important role in supporting individuals and small groups. However, learning objectives are not always sufficiently specific for the needs of the most able students. Teachers' questioning is becoming more effective in encouraging all students to take an active part in lessons. Occasionally, questioning is closed but the overall picture is that students are being encouraged to respond at length. Teachers use a good range of strategies to determine the students' understanding during lessons although it is not always clear what action is taken when students indicate their understanding is not secure.

An audit and links with its partner 'Gaining Ground' school have helped the school to identify possible vocational courses for its students. It is now working with a number of external organisations and providing a wider range of vocational courses. Whilst some courses are planned for the longer term and are dependant upon student numbers for their viability, others have already commenced. Students have participated in taster sessions and, from September 2010, will have the opportunity to participate in courses including health and beauty, motor vehicle maintenance and construction, in addition to courses related to its specialist sports college status.

The school's specialist sports college status and secondary specialism of English are contributing to the school's improvement. The lead taken by the sports department in developing a range of BTEC and diploma courses is helping in the drive to increase vocational opportunities at Key Stage 4. The assessment methodology



adopted by the sports department has helped to develop assessment and lesson planning across the school.

The local authority statement of action records its proposed support for the school and is fit for purpose. The local authority has provided a considerable amount of well-targeted support and this has been instrumental in enabling the school to make good progress. This support, together with links with its partner school, has helped to ensure the school's assessment and tracking procedures are secure. Consultant support in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, improving lesson planning and the use of assessment information has been particularly successful.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Edwards
Additional Inspector

