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Michael Paziuk
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Dear Mr Paziuk

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Chads Catholic and Church of England High School

Following my visit with Liz Kelly and Osama Abdul Rahim, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 21–22 June 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in September 2014. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in September 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils' achievement across the school accelerates rapidly, particularly in English, mathematics, geography and history, at GCSE and in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that teachers use all the information they have on pupils' capability to plan activities that will challenge pupils to think hard, deepen their understanding, awaken their curiosity, and raise their expectations of what can be achieved
 - ensuring that teachers maximise the opportunities in lessons to check their pupils' understanding, making sure that pupils have captured the key ideas in order to progress their learning
 - making sure that when teachers mark pupils' work, they focus on those aspects that will bring about the greatest gains in pupils' understanding in order to accelerate their progress, and then making sure that pupils act on this advice.

- Increase the proportion of pupils, and in particular disadvantaged pupils, making expected progress and more than expected progress in English and mathematics at GCSE, so that both measures are at least in line with national figures.

- As a matter of urgency, improve the impact of leadership and management in improving the quality of teaching, and so raise standards of achievement by:
 - ensuring that the senior leaders' and governors' evaluation of how well the school is doing, including the quality of teaching, is rigorous and robust and used to inform the priorities in the school development plan
 - ensuring governors use a range of sources of evidence on the school's performance to enable them to provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account
 - continuing to develop rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' progress across the school and in all subjects and using this information to target effective extra help for those pupils who are falling behind
 - using performance management to improve teachers' classroom practice and hold them rigorously to account for pupils' achievement
 - ensuring that improving the quality of teaching features as one of the key areas for improvement in the school development plan
 - ensuring that the information published on the school website meets statutory requirements.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Ofsted will make recommendations to the appropriate authority responsible for the school.

Report on the fifth monitoring inspection on 21 June 2016 to 22 June 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documents. They met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers, groups of pupils and students and a group of governors including the chair of the governing body. They observed teaching and learning across the school and spoke with teachers following observations. They also spent time observing how pupils behaved around the school during breaks and lunchtimes.

Context

A new headteacher took up his position in February 2016. A new head of science joined the school in January 2016 and a new head of mathematics joined at the end of May 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The arrival of the new headteacher has had a positive impact on the whole school community. He has communicated his vision for St Chad's effectively and staff say that morale has improved since his arrival. He has continued to drive the improvements reported on in previous monitoring inspection reports with a real focus on strategic planning for sustainability.

Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the quality of senior and middle leadership across the school is much improved. Inspectors were impressed with the leaders that they spoke to. They have an accurate evaluation of the areas that they lead, particularly what needs to be done to bring about further improvement. Many gave clear examples of the impact of the actions they have taken so far.

The three key subjects of English, mathematics and science are now benefiting from strong leadership. Leaders of these subjects all demonstrate the necessary skills and qualities to bring about the required improvements in their respective areas, but only the head of English has been in post long enough for her actions to have had a significant impact on pupil outcomes. Despite only being in post for a matter of weeks, the head of mathematics has a clear grasp of the key issues facing his department.

Effective leadership in the sixth form means that students benefit from their post-16 experience. High expectations and personalised study programmes enable all students to progress to higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

The special educational needs coordinator provides effective leadership in this area. She effectively monitors and evaluates the wide range of strategies that are in place to support pupils who have special educational needs or disability and as a result these pupils are making better progress.

Governors continue to play a vital part in the school's journey of improvement. New systems and procedures enable them to work strategically alongside senior leaders. As one governor explained, 'We are now working at the same speed as the school, not behind it.' Members of the governing body are reflective and have a clear focus on the impact of actions on pupil outcomes. They have effectively challenged and supported leaders through the period that the school has been subject to special measures. They are now quite rightly planning for the future when the interim executive committee is no longer required. A high priority for the governors is building capacity at all levels across the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Developing the quality of teaching and learning across the school remains one of the highest priorities for senior leaders. As a result, while a small amount of variability still remains, more pupils are benefiting from high-quality teaching.

At the heart of this high-quality teaching is the presence of strong relationships between staff and pupils that are based on mutual respect. In most lessons, teachers use their expertise and passion for their subject, coupled with their knowledge of their pupils, to enthuse and involve them in their learning. This was particularly evident in the music and dance lessons that inspectors visited during the inspection. Most teachers now use questioning skilfully to check and extend pupils' learning. An inspector saw how all these elements of very strong teaching were enabling pupils to make excellent progress in a Year 9 English lesson. The teacher had skilfully planned the learning to empower the pupils and boost their confidence in their ability to produce high quality descriptive writing.

Leaders are aware of where pupils are not benefiting from consistently good teaching and are working with this small number of teachers to develop their classroom practice.

The newly appointed head of mathematics has quickly identified that the learning in this subject remains too superficial. Teaching does not focus sufficiently on developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Senior leaders are aware that while most staff follow the school's marking policy this is not always the case. Some teachers are not using the feedback procedures effectively enough to help pupils make good progress. A work scrutiny carried out jointly by inspectors and senior leaders, revealed inconsistencies in the way teachers are challenging the most able, particularly in key stage 3.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

This area of the school was judged to be good at the last full inspection, and it remains a strength. Pupils' personal development is a high priority for leaders and a significant amount of staff training time is allocated to this aspect of the school's work.

An inspector observed a very impressive Year 9 assembly on the topic of respect. This is clearly a value that is at the heart of this school and is evident in the way that everyone within the community interacts with each other. Pupils are polite and friendly. They conduct themselves well around the school. On the very few occasions where low-level disruption occurs in lessons it is usually handled effectively by staff.

Pupils spoken to during the inspection are very positive about the school. They think that behaviour is generally good and bullying is rare. The sixth-form students who met with an inspector are very positive about their experiences in school. They value the support they receive from their head of sixth form and student support manager, and the strong relationships they have with their subject teachers.

The number of fixed-term exclusions has continued to decrease, as has the number of pupils who are internally excluded. Although there has been a reduction in the number of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability who are being excluded, this remains a key focus for leaders.

The overall rate of attendance is improving but remains just below the national average. Leaders have worked hard to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent and the overall figure is now in line with the national average. However, some pupils who have special educational needs or disability and disadvantaged pupils are still not attending school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Senior leaders are confident that the new assessment and tracking systems are yielding accurate and robust information about pupil performance. This information indicates that the headline progress and attainment figures for the present cohort of Year 11 pupils will represent an improvement on last year's figures. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in English is set to rise significantly as a result of the positive changes in this department introduced by the new leader at the start of the academic year. In contrast, progress in mathematics has not risen at the rapid pace required and the proportion of pupils predicted to make expected progress in mathematics is set to increase by only a few percentage points.

Although progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils in school and other pupils nationally are narrowing, this is not happening quickly enough and these gaps remain too wide.

The school's assessment information for Year 10 pupils indicates that only 60% are on track to achieve their target grades across a range of subjects when they reach the end of Year 11. This inconsistent progress is particularly evident for this year group in mathematics, and leaders are aware that they must act swiftly to ensure that pupils achieve well in this subject.

Performance information for sixth-form students shows that they are making progress that is broadly in line with national averages across a wide range of subjects. The number of students applying for and being offered places at university has increased this year. As was the case in 2015, all Year 13 students this year are expected to progress successfully to higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

External support

Since the headteacher took up his post in February, the support that the school has received from All Hallows Catholic College has been reduced. Senior and middle leadership across the school is now much stronger, but the headteacher knows that the ongoing relationship between the two schools means that support is available as required. Leaders and governors value the support they have received from the local authority since the last full inspection and plans are in place for this to continue as the school moves to the next stage of its journey of improvement.