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Mr Keith Turmeau
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Dear Mr Turmeau

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harrytown Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 11 January 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in January 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- quicken the amount of progress made by disadvantaged pupils, particularly in key stage 4, by:
 - ensuring that the widened range of strategies to help disadvantaged pupils have a rapid and positive impact on progress

- carefully evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies to help disadvantaged pupils, so that future planning is based upon a sound understanding of what has worked well in the past
- support pupils with low prior attainment to make faster progress across the curriculum by ensuring that teachers consistently provide these pupils with work that is carefully matched to their needs and abilities
- reduce the variability in the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders, pupils, members of the governing body, and representatives from the local authority and diocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation document were evaluated. I also looked closely at the school's website and scrutinised a range of documents, including those which relate to the school's use of the pupil premium. I conducted learning walks with the headteacher that looked at teaching in a range of subjects.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new chair of the governing body has been appointed from within the governing body. A number of new governors have also joined the governing body. You have changed the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders. The rapid turnover of staff has continued since the previous inspection. Eleven new teachers have joined the school during the last year, including two teachers of mathematics. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has been appointed from within the school and a new head of physical education has joined the staff. You have found it difficult to recruit teachers in certain subjects, particularly mathematics and geography. The school is currently without a business manager.

Main findings

You were disappointed with the judgement at the previous inspection. However, you have used this disappointment as a catalyst for making further improvements across the school. You have encouraged all staff to question the effectiveness of everything that the school does. As a result, a great deal of change has been instigated in many areas. You have been capably supported by the governing body. Governors share your frank, open and honest evaluation of the school's effectiveness. Collectively, you do not underestimate the scale of the challenge still facing the school. Furthermore, you rightly share a recognition that the pace of change needs to quicken to build upon the improvements that have already been secured.

You were understandably pleased with the improved GCSE outcomes from the 2017 GCSE examinations. For the first time in a number of years, the overall progress made by pupils was broadly in line with the national average. Moreover, pupils made faster progress in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics and languages. Despite this, you were alarmed by the further rapid decrease in progress made by disadvantaged pupils and those with low prior attainment. You have therefore ensured that your plans to improve the school focus sharply on those areas most needing improvement. Your plans make it clear how success will be measured and what time is allocated to implement change. To make sure that a sense of urgency underpins the school's work, you have recently introduced 'rapid action plans'. These are key documents which outline precisely what actions need to take place each half-term to secure fast improvements. You have devised plans for all key areas, such as to improve teaching in mathematics and to increase the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

You have launched a new website since the previous inspection. The website now provides readers with access to a wealth of key information in a way that is easily understood by parents and other users. Leaders have also rationalised and simplified the school's use of data. As a result, staff and pupils now share a common understanding of what pupils' target grades mean and what evidence underpins judgements about pupils' current levels of attainment.

You recognise the importance of maintaining a relentless focus on developing the quality of teaching. You have empowered middle leaders to raise standards of teaching in their areas. For example, subject leaders have sharpened the ways in which they monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching. You have also improved the quality of training for teachers. In addition, you have refined the way that the school manages the performance of teachers. You now ensure that all staff are set targets that relate directly to the school's most pressing priorities. The way in which you monitor the quality of teaching focuses heavily on those areas identified during the previous inspection. As a result, you are confident that teachers now use questioning more effectively. Indeed, we visited several lessons in which teachers used questioning skilfully to probe and check pupils' understanding.

Teachers are becoming increasingly adept at challenging the most able pupils in lessons. These improvements were reflected in the significantly better performance of the most able pupils in the 2017 GCSE examinations. Teachers are beginning to improve the quality of teaching for pupils with low prior attainment. The new SENCo has ensured that teaching assistants are deployed more effectively to help both pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those with low prior attainment. Despite this, teaching for lower-ability pupils is not as effective as it is for other groups. This is because teachers do not consistently provide these pupils with activities that are well suited to their abilities and needs.

You are also aware that teaching has improved more quickly in some areas than others. This reflects the significant variation that remains in the quality of pupils' outcomes across the curriculum. You have continued to challenge the teachers of subjects that can serve their pupils better. In particular, you have challenged teachers of technology and art to do better. You are also aware that improvements to the teaching of mathematics remain fragile. This, in part, is due to the continued high turnover of staff and the reliance on supply teachers. As a result, you are acutely aware of the need to consolidate and build upon improved teaching in mathematics to ensure that all pupils benefit from effective teaching.

You fully understand that the performance of disadvantaged pupils in the 2017 GCSE examinations was unacceptably low. You have therefore broadened the scope of your strategy to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Crucially, you have made sure that every member of staff is now accountable for the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Staff understand the moral imperative for rapidly improving the progress, and therefore life chances, of disadvantaged pupils. Teachers now use a wider range of strategies to accelerate the progress of the disadvantaged. For example, teachers are now very careful about where they sit these pupils within the classroom to ensure that these pupils receive the precise support they need. Teachers have also increased the frequency of parental communication and ensured that greater attention is paid to checking the understanding of these pupils. As a result of this work, disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make faster progress, particularly in key stage 3.

Despite these efforts, differences in the attainment, progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils compared to others remain wide. Leaders' evaluation of the 2016/17 pupil premium strategy is vague and imprecise. Leaders have not carefully measured the impact of different interventions to help the disadvantaged. As a result, plans for the current year are not based upon a sound understanding of what has worked well in the past.

External support

The diocese and local authority have worked closely and effectively to ensure that the school has continued to receive appropriate and timely support. In particular, they have continued to enlist the support of leaders from the Laurus Trust and the Loreto Teaching School. This support has been wide and varied. However, the most intense support has been focused on the development of teaching in mathematics. This support has helped to improve teaching in mathematics, which led to modest improvements in the 2017 GCSE results. You have used the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium as a springboard for developing the breadth of your approach to improving provision for disadvantaged pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector