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Mr Neil Maslen
Interim Headteacher
St Boniface's Catholic College
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Dear Mr Maslen

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Boniface's Catholic College

Following my visit with Sue Frater, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 January 2018, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2017.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose

the school's action plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services

for Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Lee
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2017

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - addressing urgently the weaknesses in safeguarding procedures and processes, including in the sixth form
 - devising and implementing an effective improvement plan, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching, including through appraisal, and responding robustly where weaknesses are identified
 - ensuring that checks on teaching quality take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and the feedback gathered is used to develop a suitable programme of staff training
 - supporting leaders in developing the skills and confidence they need to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make more rapid progress
 - making sure that funding provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including Year 7 catch-up funding, is used effectively.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress by:
 - establishing an effective culture of safety and safeguarding in which bullying, discrimination and poor behaviour are not tolerated
 - raising expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning
 - ensuring that the school's approach to improving pupils' behaviour is effective and followed consistently
 - making sure that teaching interests and engages all pupils in their work, motivates them and helps them to make good progress.
- Improve attendance for all groups of pupils and rapidly reduce the proportion of pupils persistently absent from school.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations of achievement for all groups of pupils
 - identifying the needs of different groups of pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - using assessment information to identify the next steps in pupils' learning and

help them to catch up more effectively

- making sure that work is challenging enough to enable the most able pupils to reach higher standards
- maintaining a systematic focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills.

■ Improve the curriculum by:

- making sure that all pupils are following courses and programmes best suited to their needs and aspirations, including in the sixth form
- implementing a systematic approach to improving pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
- ensuring a planned and coherent approach to support pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development more effectively, including in the sixth form.

■ Improve the impact of leadership in the sixth form by:

- ensuring that record-keeping is accurate, of good quality and effective
- regularly evaluating the impact of provision in the sixth form, including the impact of teaching and the curriculum provided through the partnership.

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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 17 and 18 January 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders, other staff, pupils, members of the interim academy board (IAB) and representatives of Plymouth CAST, the multi-academy trust of which the school is a member. Inspectors visited lessons accompanied by senior leaders. During these visits, they talked to pupils about their education and looked at their work. In addition, inspectors scrutinised larger samples of pupils' work.

Context

Since the inspection in May 2017 that led to the school becoming subject to special measures, there have been substantial changes to the school's senior leadership and governance. In June 2017, an interim headteacher was appointed. In the same month, an interim management board was established to replace the governing body, which had been disbanded immediately after the May 2017 inspection. The five-strong board, which recently changed its name to interim academy board, consists of four experienced educationalists and the local parish priest. As a result of internal promotion, two new assistant headteachers took up their posts in September 2017. The school only has vocational students in Year 12 at the moment and there are plans to form a joint sixth form with a neighbouring school in the multi-academy trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

In the aftermath of the inspection in May 2017, the multi-academy trust took decisive action to reconfigure the leadership and governance of the school. The trust's area adviser responsible for the school immediately began work to improve safeguarding and shortly thereafter assumed the role of interim headteacher on a full-time basis. He has given a much-needed sense of direction and energy to the school's work. He is well supported by his senior leadership team, including two new assistant headteachers, who are adding enthusiasm and drive to the school's plans for improvement.

The trust has also added significantly to the capacity of governance to bring about rapid improvement. The IAB brings a wealth of experience to this task. Experienced educationalists, they monitor, evaluate and review the school's work with rigour. For example, their monitoring visits are highly effective in identifying the key challenges the school faces. On the basis of this detailed understanding, the IAB robustly challenges school leaders to bring about the necessary changes and holds them rigorously to account. In short, governance is now highly effective and a strength of the school.

A key feature of the school's leadership team and the IAB is that they make no attempt to deny the extensive inadequacies identified at the inspection in May 2017 or the size of the task the school faces to ensure that pupils achieve a good education. This clarity of insight informs all leaders' work and means they have drawn up effective action plans to address the many areas of the school's work that require urgent attention. Moreover, this clear understanding of the school's position has allowed leaders to demonstrate quickly the capacity to improve by successfully tackling aspects such as low attendance and poor behaviour.

The leadership of teaching has improved. The two new assistant headteachers are taking this area forward and, as a consequence, the processes for evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are more robust. This means that middle leaders and classroom teachers who need further support have been quickly identified and appropriate support put in place. Leaders are trying hard to drive forward a culture change in the understanding of what constitutes good-quality teaching. They now challenge teaching that does not promote the rapid progress that pupils need to make. There is still a long way to go to ensure that teaching is consistently good across the school, but leaders have put in place some secure foundations upon which to build.

Senior leaders have taken swift action to improve the school's sixth-form provision, especially with regard to the study programmes for students on vocational programmes. Previously, the school had not monitored the progress or attendance of these students. Nor had it developed procedures to ensure that these pupils were safe at their off-site placements. Procedures have been considerably tightened up since the previous inspection. Leaders now have a much better understanding of the progress students make on their vocational courses and robust procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding is effective for these students. Nevertheless, further work is needed to make sure that the quality of the 16 to 19 study programmes is good. This is especially the case in relation to the requirements to ensure that post-16 students undertake meaningful non-qualification activity and the promotion of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.

School leaders have devised a coherent and structured programme to promote the SMSC development of pupils from Year 7 to Year 13. No such programme had been in place previously. However, the extent to which this programme can be successfully delivered, largely through tutor periods, to the required level of depth is unclear. Leaders recognise this and from September 2018 a dedicated fortnightly lesson will be introduced in key stage 3 to provide more time to cover this essential aspect of the school's work.

In May 2017, safeguarding was judged to be ineffective. Rectifying this was the first priority of the school's new leadership. Leaders overhauled procedures entirely and commissioned an external safeguarding audit from Plymouth City Council. As a result of these actions, there is now a much more effective culture of safeguarding in the school. Procedures are more rigorous and record-keeping has been

substantially improved by the implementation of a new online system to record, for example, in-school referrals to the designated safeguarding lead. Pupils say they feel safer now. Teachers are more visible around the school during lunch and breaktimes and at the beginning and end of the day. Pupils also report a decline in the use of derogatory language around the school and say that staff are more proactive in tackling it should it occur.

School leaders have a better understanding now of the most effective ways to promote the progress of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium. It is too early to say, however, what the long-term outcome of recent initiatives will be, as they have not had time to reveal any significant impact yet.

Leaders have introduced a new approach to assessment and feedback, one which aims to make it clear to pupils what they are doing well and what are the next steps that they need to take to improve. Implementation of this policy across the school is very patchy and it is clear that some teachers need more help to identify areas for improvement and provide effective feedback to pupils. Nonetheless, pupils commented on how they are now getting better help on how to improve their work.

Leaders have yet to undertake the external reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium recommended by inspectors at the time of the previous inspection. This is a reasonable approach given the circumstances. Substantial changes to governance took place immediately after the inspection and there is little point in reviewing governance until the IAB has had sufficient time to demonstrate its full impact. The school had two reviews of the use of pupil premium in 2016/17 and has introduced further initiatives recently. So, again, the time is not quite ripe yet for the review to be undertaken.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains the school's biggest challenge, although leaders' actions have brought about some positive developments. Teaching is supported by a more appropriate assessment system that supplies teachers with better information about pupils' achievement, including those in key groups such as the most able, the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

In key stage 3, leaders have introduced a new approach to assessment based around what can be expected of pupils in each subject in each year and the security of their knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils say that they like this new approach and that, when used effectively, it helps them to understand what to do to improve their work.

Nonetheless, senior leaders and the IAB are keenly aware that the assessment information used by the school is not robust enough yet. Among other things, this means that it is more difficult to measure the impact of initiatives to improve

teaching than it should be. Leaders are working on benchmarking internal assessments against those undertaken by other schools in order to improve their reliability.

Leaders have adopted what they refer to as a 'back to basics' approach to improving the consistency of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. They have set very clear expectations of what they expect from teachers in terms of the planning and delivery of lessons. This has had a mixed impact. Leaders' expectations have been successfully translated into action by teachers in some areas, such as how lessons are expected to start, but other aspects are inconsistently applied.

As a consequence, the level of challenge across most subjects and year groups is typically still too low, although improving in places. Similarly, teachers' expectations of the standard of pupils' work and its presentation are also too low. As a result of this lack of challenge and low expectations, pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. This is noticeable in core subjects such as mathematics and science, whereas in humanities and physical education more challenging and engaging teaching quickens pupils' progress.

To take mathematics as an example, the work that pupils do in Years 7 and 8 takes little account of what they already know, understand and can do, especially the most able pupils. This results in pupils doing work more suited to pupils in key stage 2, even when they achieved highly in the national curriculum assessments at the end of Year 6.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' actions have had the most visible impact in improving pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. This is particularly true with regard to pupils' conduct and their attendance. Improvements in personal development and welfare are built on the typically positive relationships between pupils and staff.

Behaviour has improved significantly and quickly since the previous inspection. Pupils' conduct around the school and in lessons is much better as a result of effective actions by leaders. Staff have successfully implemented the new behaviour policy and pupils have risen to its expectations. As a result of consistent application of the new policy, the need to use sanctions for poor behaviour has declined. In particular, the use of internal isolation has reduced dramatically and is currently at one tenth of its previous rate. Inspectors saw very little disruptive behaviour during their visit, but when it did occur staff dealt with it calmly and confidently. The school's records show that bullying has reduced significantly and pupils confirmed that this is the case.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are also improving. Where teaching is engaging, challenging and stimulating they are enthusiastic about learning. Where teaching is

less engaging, however, behaviour is compliant but attitudes are less positive.

Leaders have focused successfully on improving attendance. So far this year, pupils' attendance has improved noticeably and is much closer now to the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is also falling, although it is still above the national average. For disadvantaged pupils, however, the rate of persistent absence is low. School leaders are not afraid to challenge the parents of pupils with high rates of absence and are communicating consistent and clear messages about the importance of good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Given the significant inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, it is no surprise that outcomes for pupils are similarly inconsistent. Where teaching is not challenging enough or pays too little attention to what pupils can already do, progress is limited. The work in pupils' books and folders shows that too much teaching is having an insufficient impact over time on the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.

The need to develop pupils' basic literacy skills was an area for improvement identified at the inspection in 2017. Senior leaders are supporting the leadership of English to improve this aspect of pupils' outcomes. Teachers across the curriculum are expected to focus on subject-specific keywords in their lesson planning and this is being consistently done across the curriculum. In geography and biology, for example, pupils' literacy is being effectively developed in this manner. In broader aspects of literacy, however, such as sentence construction, pupils are not yet consistently applying the skills they develop in English to other subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils' oral literacy skills are improving. Teachers encourage pupils to talk about their learning as a means of developing their understanding, as they are aware that for many boys the inability to communicate their thinking clearly can be a barrier to further progress.

Since the previous inspection, the school has had a set of GCSE results published. These examinations were taken just after the inspection in May 2017. They provide a telling indication of how inadequate outcomes for pupils were at that time and illustrate the scale of the task that the school faces to improve them. On average, pupils at key stage 4 in 2017 attained at nearly a whole grade below pupils nationally with similar starting points. Disadvantaged pupils attained on average one and a half grades lower than other pupils nationally.

External support

The school receives most of its support from within the multi-academy trust. It also works with other schools outside the trust on aspects of leadership and teaching.

The closest links are with St Cuthbert Mayne School in Torquay, whose headteacher is a member of the IAB. In addition, school leaders have worked with the local authority to improve safeguarding and the post-16 provision. The school is also working with the Plymouth Teaching Schools' Alliance on a project to develop pupils' oral skills.