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29 January 2014

Mr Thomas Ryan
Headteacher
St Joseph's Catholic High School, Business and Enterprise College
Harrington Road
Workington
Cumbria
CA14 3EE

Dear Mr Ryan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Joseph's Catholic High School, Business and Enterprise College, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- cultivate ways to engage students more actively as participants in the development of a strong aspirational and improvement culture.
- extend work with external partners so as to further entrench an improvement and aspirational culture which challenges all students and particularly the more able.
- promote additional activities, such as debating, reading groups and subject specific student groups, to further stretch and challenge all students and in particular the more able.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority. A meeting was arranged with a group of students representing the most able students. The school

improvement plan was evaluated. Documents summarising other actions taken since the section 5 inspection were also scrutinised. A learning walk of the school was undertaken with the headteacher.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's context since the section 5 inspection.

Main findings

The headteacher and other senior leaders have produced a post inspection improvement plan that tackles the key recommendations arising from the November inspection. It is supported by a well-focused monitoring and evaluation scheduled that charts actions taken and evaluates their impact.

The school has a strong focus on the ways and means to tackle the underperformance of the most able students particularly in English. The school's effective tracking and monitoring systems are now better focused on charting the progress of the more able and identifying where interventions are required to enable better student progress. Controlled assessment practice has been sharpened. There is a stronger focus to ensure that work in lessons meets the learning needs of all students. Professional development programmes for staff have focused on ways to develop greater independence in learning for students. Additional learning walks and work scrutiny by senior staff have been introduced to monitor the progress of the most able students. Coaching and bespoke packages to improve identified subject areas where high level grades at GCSE are too low have been introduced. Independent learners' programmes are to be introduced through tutorial time and integrated into the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Programmes are now in place to share the best practice in teaching and learning more effectively and in particular those that promote challenge for the more able students. I discussed with the headteacher the need to engage students more fully as participants in the development of an aspirational and improvement culture. I have also asked the school to consider how best to develop the Key Stage 3 curriculum so as to better enhance and embed student literacy, oracy and independent learning skills. School improvement planning has a strong focus on ensuring that all students benefit from new initiatives to promote independent learning skills and more stretch and challenge activities.

Governors have strengthened their understanding of student monitoring and tracking evidence and how well students are doing. They have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve the progress that the more able students make. Half-term reports are made to the Governors' Standards Committee on the implementation and impact of the post inspection school improvement plan. I have suggested to governors that they meet half-termly or termly with a group of more able students to discuss with them the impact of stretch and challenge initiatives.

External support

The local authority is committed to supporting the school in aiding its improvement planning and practice. I have suggested that work should be extended with best practice external partners so as to enhance the development and sustainability of an aspirational and improvement culture which challenges all students but particularly the more able.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cumbria and as below.

Yours sincerely

Patrick Geraghty
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Director of Children's Services, Cumbria