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Mr Leslie Rippon
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Dear Mr Rippon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Francis Xavier's College

Following my visit to your school on 12 May 2017, 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 February 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that fewer disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are regularly absent from the school and that disadvantaged pupils continue to make faster progress throughout the school
- ensure that plans to improve the school contain measurable targets that will allow leaders and governors to check progress effectively
- further intensify efforts to reduce variabilities in the quality of teaching, particularly in science, by ensuring that training for teachers is carefully matched to their needs
- extend the school's promising work on literacy, by increasing the focus on developing pupils' writing across the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, other senior leaders, a group of teachers, pupils, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a representative from the archdiocese to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation document were evaluated. I undertook a learning walk and work scrutiny with leaders from the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have been appointed as the school's executive headteacher. A deputy headteacher has been promoted to head of school. You have created the position of deputy special educational needs coordinator and this role is fulfilled by an experienced teacher from the school. You have also appointed a new librarian.

Main findings

You have overseen significant improvements since the previous inspection and there is clear evidence to indicate that the school is moving forwards in many important areas. Your evaluation of the school's work is thorough and perceptive. You recognise the impact of the work you have already done but do not underestimate the scale of the task still facing the school. You have injected the school community with a renewed sense of urgency and determination to improve and it is clearly evident that both pupils and staff feel that the school is improving quickly. In tandem with the governing body, you have created effective structures for driving far-reaching improvements. In particular, the 'governor monitoring group' plays a key role in holding leaders to account and maintaining an intense focus on improving provision in areas where the need is greatest.

Your plans to improve the school are detailed and suitably broad. Your plans make it clear what actions are to be taken and who is accountable for developments in particular areas. Despite this, your plans do not contain clear measurable targets and benchmark indicators that would enable governors and leaders to more accurately evaluate the progress that is being made.

The actions taken to improve the quality of teaching are having a positive impact and pupils are making quicker progress across the curriculum and particularly in key stage 3. In the lessons I saw and the books I scrutinised, it is clear that the majority of teachers have increased their expectations of what pupils can achieve, including the most able pupils. The school has introduced a new marking and feedback policy and this has led to improvements in the way that pupils respond to feedback they are given by their teachers. Pupils told me that they greatly appreciate the improvements that have been made to teaching and they feel that teachers really care about the amount of progress they make. They find most lessons interesting

and useful. In particular, pupils said that they really enjoy learning history and geography. Despite this, there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching. Teaching is particularly strong in languages and English. However, standards of teaching remain stubbornly variable in science. You are acutely aware of this issue and your own monitoring of teaching rightly indicates that teaching is improving much quicker in some subjects compared to others.

Teachers greatly value the improvements that have been made to their training. In particular, they see importance in their work with teachers in other subjects to develop important aspects of teaching. Leaders involve teachers in a vibrant debate about what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Your team has introduced many mechanisms for sharing effective ideas on teaching and this is clearly having an impact on increasing the effectiveness of teaching. Despite this, you are not yet ensuring that teachers receive specific training that supports them to address their practice in areas that have been identified as needing improvement. As a result, some teachers have not improved their practice quickly enough since the previous inspection.

You have been successful in improving pupils' literacy skills. Leaders have focused on improving pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills. You have created a strong reading culture in which the majority of your pupils enjoy reading. Furthermore, the implementation of your new feedback policy is starting to make a positive contribution to the development of pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Despite this, you acknowledge that more needs to be done to develop pupils' writing across the curriculum.

Pupils performed better in the 2016 external examinations compared to recent years. In the GCSE examinations, pupils demonstrated that they had made quicker progress in most areas of the curriculum. You presented information which indicates that pupils are making even faster progress this year. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities performed particularly well in external examinations last year. You have also improved provision more broadly for these pupils. You have significantly increased leadership capacity in this area and leaders have transformed the school's approach to supporting these pupils. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the new deputy SENCo now take responsibility for ensuring that these pupils fulfil their academic and social potential. They have ensured that all subject leaders maintain a consistent focus on providing effective teaching for these pupils. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making progress that is at least as fast as others throughout the school.

You also presented information to indicate that disadvantaged pupils are making quicker progress throughout the school. Disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress because leaders have increased teachers' awareness of the need to challenge these pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress in mathematics and differences in the progress of these pupils and others are

diminishing in most curriculum areas. In contrast, differences in achievement remain pronounced in science.

You have developed the range of strategies employed to reduce the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from the school. You have increased the role of the educational welfare officer and you have continued to challenge pupils who are regularly absent from school. You have strengthened the range of strategies you use to engage parents and other agencies when there are concerns about regular absence. Despite this, you are understandably disappointed that overall absence has increased this year. Moreover, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from the school has also increased, particularly pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent has decreased, you acknowledge that the rate of improvement has not been fast enough.

External support

Since the inspection in February 2016, the school has been very proactive in seeking external support and has become very outward facing in its approach. The school has been closely and ably supported by the local authority. The local authority knows the school very well and a representative of the local authority plays a vital role in the 'governor monitoring group' that formed after the previous inspection. The local authority is positive about developments within the school and optimistic for the future. It has supported the school to develop the mathematics and science departments. The school has recently started working closely with Palmerston School to accelerate improvement within the science department.

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

Yours sincerely

Will Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector