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3 October 2011

Mrs P Sheard
Headteacher
St Catherine's Catholic High School
Holdsworth Road
Holmfield
Halifax
West Yorkshire
HX2 9TH

Dear Mrs Sheard,

Notice to improve: monitoring inspection of St Catherine's Catholic High School

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave to me when I inspected your school on 30 September 2011 and for the information which you provided during the inspection. Please also pass my thanks on to the Chair of the Governing Body, the National Challenge Adviser and those students who took the time to speak with me.

Since the last inspection the school has experienced considerable turbulence. The sixth form has closed and subsequently the number of teachers has substantially reduced. The number of students on roll in the main school has also declined. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who speak English as an additional language has increased. The school's plans to convert to an academy have been delayed.

As a result of the inspection on 24 and 25 January 2011, the school was asked to address the most important areas for improvement which are set out in the annex to this letter.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making satisfactory progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the students' achievement.

The school has had significant success in raising attainment so that most students were successful in gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE in 2011. There was also an increase in the numbers of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The progress students make across the school is improving and more students are now making expected progress. However, the progress made by students in English, and particularly in mathematics, at the end of Year 11 last year was below expectations. Senior and middle leaders are aware of the need to accelerate progress swiftly in both English and mathematics. Progress in lessons is becoming more consistent.

The main reason for these improvements is because teaching is improving. The school has been successful in largely eradicating inadequate teaching and the majority of lessons are

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now good or better. There remains a stubborn core of teaching that is no better than satisfactory and this is not enabling students to accelerate their learning and overcome previously poor progress. Teachers' lesson planning has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers consistently identify students' needs, but they do not always plan how those needs will be met. In many lessons, students of differing abilities are set the same work and given the same amount of time in which to complete it. Consequently, the more able are not always sufficiently challenged, while students who find learning difficult struggle with their work. Teachers have worked diligently to improve their questioning skills and ask open questions. However, the use of questions to check students' understanding and promote extended answers is not well developed and students lack confidence in offering more than one or two word answers. Thoughtful marking gives students a clear idea of what is good in their work and the next steps they should take to improve. There are examples of particularly good marking, where students have a dialogue with their teachers to quickly address mistakes.

Overall attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. This is because the school has put in place regular and consistent programmes to promote good attendance and challenge absence where necessary. There are several families who take holidays during term time and this has a detrimental effect on the progress made by their children. The school can point to some striking examples where students who struggle to attend school regularly have been supported to improve their attendance. However, despite the school's best efforts, the proportion of students who are persistently absent remains above the national average.

Leaders have made good use of external support to introduce secure and systematic checks on the quality of lessons and students' work. Middle leaders play a significant role in quality assurance and in supporting teachers to improve their practice. Consequently, teaching is steadily improving.

The school has made sound use of its specialist status as a technology college to share good practice across the school. There remains a strong commitment to working with other schools to share expertise and improve the teaching of technology in the local area.

The support offered by the local authority, the National Challenge Adviser and other partners has been effective. The statement of action prepared by the local authority meets requirements.

I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your school. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Joan Hewitt
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Annex
The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in January 2011

- Raise achievement, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of good or better lessons and eliminating inadequate classroom practice
 - continuing to monitor rigorously the quality of teaching on a regular basis, ensuring observations focus on students' progress.

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan activities which are well matched to students' different ability levels
 - using questioning more effectively to challenge students' thinking and check their understanding
 - ensuring that marking consistently provides students with clear guidance on how to improve their work.

- Improve attendance to reach the national average by July 2011 by:
 - continuing to implement the programme of concerted team actions to promote good attendance
 - increasing further the attendance rate of those students with a track record of persistent absence.