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3 October 2018

Mr Sean Tucker
Acting Head of School
St Gregory the Great Catholic School
Cricket Road
Cowley
Oxford
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Dear Mr Tucker

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Judith O'Hare and Suzanne Richards, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 18 to 19 September 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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.

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 school improvement board, the executive principal of the Dominic Barberi Multi-Academy Company (DBMAC), the chair of the school improvement board, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's

services for Oxfordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Ensure that safeguarding is effective, by:
 - making sure that leaders and governors know, understand and carry out their statutory safeguarding responsibilities effectively
 - ensuring that staff are well trained in the use of restrictive physical intervention
 - having clear and consistent systems that enable any adult to record any concern promptly
 - making sure that all actions following a concern are systematically recorded, so that it is clear who did what and when.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - ensuring that governors review all aspects of the school's work to hold leaders to account, using full and accurate information, so that required improvements are secured and sustained
 - increasing the levels of capacity and expertise in behaviour management and ensuring that staff are supported so that they can implement an agreed approach to managing behaviour
 - ensuring that leaders look carefully at the progress of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that additional funding is used effectively to raise achievement.
- Improve pupils' behaviour in key stages 3 and 4 so that it is at least good, by:
 - making sure that well-trained staff have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour
 - improving the attendance of pupils
 - ensuring that pupils in the secondary phase move to lessons promptly and that incidents of bullying are addressed robustly.
- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving.
- Raise pupils' achievement through key stages 1 to 4, by:
 - accelerating pupils' progress so they make good progress over time
 - ensuring that pupils reach higher standards in GCSE examinations
 - making sure that the most able pupils reach the high standards of which they are capable.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of the leadership may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 18 to 19 September 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all phases of the school, spoke to pupils and reviewed their work. Meetings were held with senior leaders, the school improvement adviser, directors of the DBMAC, a director from the Archdiocese of Birmingham and a group of middle leaders in the secondary phase. An inspector met with teachers and leaders in the primary sector. Inspectors met formally with representative groups of pupils from all phases and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff in the secondary phase. Documents related to the work of the school improvement board were scrutinised. Inspectors checked the school's arrangements for safeguarding and the procedures for recruiting new staff. Inspectors evaluated plans to improve the school. They also reviewed the school's analysis of the latest examination and test results from the early years, key stage 1, key stage 4 and sixth-form outcomes. Samples of work were considered. An inspector spoke to parents dropping off their children in the primary school.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, 13 teachers have left the school and five have been appointed. Two senior leaders have left the school. The national leader of education, who had been working with the school at the time of the last monitoring inspection, is no longer supporting the school. An education adviser has been commissioned from the Archdiocese of Birmingham to support the school.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Immediately following the last monitoring inspection, the acting head of school and senior leaders set about creating suitable plans to improve the school. They obtained appropriate support to help them and ensured that all senior leaders and middle leaders were involved in the work on the plan. As a result, there is now a plan that is fit for purpose, and, if implemented and monitored carefully, is likely to bring about improvement.

The school improvement plan has had a tangible and positive impact already. The leadership team are working more cohesively and supportively with each other than previously. They have a common purpose that is shared with all staff and they have gained confidence as a team. At the time of the last monitoring inspection, there had been tensions within the team that were not adequately tackled by school directors or governors. This is no longer the case and at last the school is moving forwards. However, directors, governors and leaders agree with inspectors that no more time must be wasted. It has taken too long to get to this improved position of confidence and understanding. Leaders are now working with momentum, determination and focus.

The local academy committee, which performs the role of a board of governors, have reformed as a school improvement board (SIB). They are now focusing on the right priorities and carrying out their statutory duties professionally and astutely. Members of the SIB were able to provide inspectors with convincing evidence that they are beginning to challenge school leaders and hold them to account stringently. Lines of accountability and responsibility from the DBMAC directors through to the SIB have been clarified.

During this inspection it was notable that, in very nearly all cases, directors, governors and school leaders are no longer making excuses for failures in the past. Instead, they are trying to use the lessons learned to put pupils first.

Through the creation of the school improvement plan, the acting head of school has gained confidence and ownership of the school's direction. He continues to provide a reassuring and stable presence for the school community. The acting deputy head of school ensures that balanced and fair evaluations of the school's work are carried out. She provides sensitive and thoughtful support for other leaders and responds well to advice and guidance. The head of the primary sector has built up an energetic and committed team of staff. She understands the local community well and has built up the primary sector's positive reputation among parents. Determination, careful planning and a can-do attitude characterise the work of the assistant headteachers responsible for teaching and learning and pupils' behaviour and attendance. These leaders have won the faith and respect of staff, governors and directors because of the impact that they have already made on pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance.

There is no doubt that school leaders work extremely hard, and that they are now more confident in their work. They appreciate their increased autonomy, support and accountability. Senior leaders commented that although their working days are demanding, they feel that their decisions are trusted and valued.

Arrangements for safeguarding in the school continue to be effective. The three designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs) regularly review their actions to protect pupils from harm. They strive to do even more. They are alert to the risks to children in the community and make sure that their own training is fully up to date. Leaders have made sure that all staff across the school have revised their training in line with the latest guidance from the Secretary of State. Recent improvements to the school's safeguarding procedures have included increasing capacity and expertise among pastoral staff and leaders responsible for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. These leaders have more authority to source additional help and curriculum pathways for those pupils who find themselves most vulnerable. The DSLs are also developing better support for pupils and families experiencing mental health difficulties. As a consequence, pupils are safer than previously and can make the most of what the school offers.

Pupils' behaviour continues to improve under the capable and consistent management from school leaders and staff. Staff and pupils spoke to inspectors about the calm and 'civilised' atmosphere in the school.

Pupil premium funding is not having enough impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils in the secondary phase. At the time of the previous monitoring inspection, leaders' initial plans appeared to have potential. However, leaders know that their evaluation of the impact of funding has not been precise or accurate enough. They accept that this aspect of the school's work needs to improve by the time of the next monitoring inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching and learning are improving in most areas of the school. In the primary sector and sixth form, teaching and learning continue to be generally stronger and more consistent than in the secondary phase.

Nevertheless, in the secondary phase, inspectors saw growing evidence of teachers' improved subject knowledge. Teachers can make good use of their store of expertise and experience because pupils are, in most cases, keen to listen and learn. Many teachers use questioning well. Pupils respond conscientiously and dig deep for answers and explanations.

Senior leaders are sensibly supporting teachers' confidence and shared expertise by insisting on common approaches. For example, they insist on neat presentation, helpful feedback for pupils and a close focus on literacy. Certainly, pupils have responded positively to the improved high expectations at the start of this term. Their work is orderly and they are trying hard to stay focused and produce work to be proud of.

Leaders have identified that they need to improve their arrangements for assessing pupils' work in the secondary phase. They are making sure that they have well-timed assessment points during the year and that these assessments tell them what they need to know about pupils' progress. It is too early to gauge the impact of this initiative.

While many pupils have gained confidence and trust in their teachers, some lack self-assurance in their own ability and remain hesitant about answering questions. In both the primary and secondary phase, pupils sometimes do not know what to do when they are not directed by the teacher. They sit and wait for instructions, when they could easily check some things themselves or consider the next task or activity. Pupils in the secondary phase acknowledge that when they have a series of different teachers, they feel unsettled and do not concentrate as well as they should.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has continued to improve. Teachers' raised expectations, more consistent leadership and better systems of sanctions and consequences are changing pupils' attitudes. There are no loopholes in the school's behaviour management system, and, as at the previous monitoring inspection, pupils are confident that misbehaviour will be dealt with. In most lessons, there are fewer disruptions and interruptions to learning than previously. The worrying incidents of disrespectful and defiant behaviour seen outside of class at the last monitoring inspection were not evident this time.

Around the site, pupils of all ages are friendly and polite. They wear their uniform proudly and try to show off their best side in lessons and with visitors. Staff understandably make sure that pupils are well supervised during lunchtimes and breaks on the spacious school site. During this monitoring inspection, inspectors were pleased to see pupils playing games enthusiastically and safely. Other pupils enjoyed sitting together and chatting. No one appeared to be left out or lonely.

Exclusion rates overall are declining as pupils' behaviour improves. Leaders in all phases are confident that they only exclude pupils as a last resort if behaviour is completely unacceptable or violent. School leaders are developing better provision for those pupils whose challenging behaviour arises from mental health difficulties. Nevertheless, exclusion rates remain high when compared with national figures and particularly so for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged.

The school's work to improve pupils' attendance has moved on since the last monitoring inspection. Attendance is now the high priority it should be throughout the school. Leaders are using the information gathered by the attendance officer to work strategically to reduce absence. Heads of year and tutors take responsibility for promoting attendance through direct contact with pupils and their families. These leaders are in the process of reviewing how the school can reward good and improving attendance. School leaders have also wisely enlisted support from other local agencies that promote good school attendance. Although attendance rates remain below national figures in all phases in the school, there are early signs that figures are improving. For example, current attendance rates are better than at this time last year. It is too soon to judge the full impact of the new strategies, but this is a good start.

Pupils' punctuality to lessons has also improved. During this inspection, there were very few pupils not in class on time without good reason and lessons started promptly, with fewer interruptions from latecomers.

Outcomes for pupils

The legacy of inadequate leadership, weak teaching, poor attendance and pupils' unsatisfactory behaviour has, not surprisingly, led to disappointing provisional grades at GCSE in 2018. Outcomes in the sixth form, too, are disappointing, although it is encouraging to find that some students have succeeded in gaining places at prestigious universities.

School leaders, governors and directors are not making any excuses for poor outcomes and have got straight on with analysing pupils' performance and identifying what needs to change. Leaders have correctly identified that some pupils were not taking the right courses, which limited their achievement. School leaders are reviewing the curriculum on offer for pupils in the secondary phase, in order to ensure that no ceilings are placed on what pupils can achieve. Leaders are acutely aware that they must ensure that current pupils are well prepared for their final examinations and are given every opportunity to catch up. Leaders have rightly identified that pupils' progress, particularly in literacy, needs to improve rapidly in key stage 3.

Although very early in the academic year, pupils' books and folders demonstrate evidence that they are beginning to build on their previous learning and make better progress. Inspectors saw pupils' work that was neat, accurate, appropriate for their ability and with a suitable balance of content and skills. Leaders are ensuring that pupils' targets are ambitious but realistic and based on accurate assessment of their progress throughout the curriculum.

Pupils in the primary sector and the early years have made better progress overall than those in the secondary phase. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 can read accurately, using their good phonic knowledge. They have also benefited from specialist mathematics teaching, which has helped them to attain well. However, the head of the primary sector has correctly identified that pupils' reading comprehension is not as advanced as it should be and that pupils will need to be better prepared for the demands of the curriculum in Year 6.

External support

The diocese has commissioned a school improvement adviser to work alongside school leaders on a weekly basis. He understands the school and its context well. He provides frank and assertive advice about the standards that need to be reached. Leaders are working effectively with his guidance, while taking responsibility themselves for decisions and action-planning.

The head of the primary sector benefits from advice and guidance from a school improvement partner, which is helping to raise standards and support her work as the school grows.

Following the judgements made at the first and second monitoring inspection, DBMAC has now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose.