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Mr Haydn Evans CBE
The Headteacher
Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat Church of England Secondary School
Stepney Way
Stepney
London
E1 0RH

Dear Mr Evans

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir John Cass's Foundation and Redcoat Church of England Secondary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 January 2015, 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 which 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 which took place in October 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority, a representative from the London Diocesan Schools Board, five teachers and five sixth form students. The inspector toured the school with the headteacher, to see staff and students in lessons and in the school's social areas. The inspector evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans. Minutes of the most recent meetings of the governing body and other school documentation were scrutinised, in particular those relating to safeguarding.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, two teachers have left the school. A new assistant headteacher was appointed from within the school and 10 new staff joined the support team. Four members of the governing body, including the former Chair, have left and a new Chair and Vice Chair appointed. The school has passed its leadership of Teach Direct to a partner school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

School leaders have taken rapid action to address the concerns raised in the last inspection. They understand the seriousness of the safeguarding issues and the potential risks to students. The school is taking a phased approach to its improvement work. The initial action plan sets out in detail the immediate actions needed to tackle all aspects of the two areas for improvement. School documentation and discussions with leaders show that they are using information from the evaluation of current actions to inform the next phase of improvement. However, the plan would benefit from a clearer overview of these next phases for improvement. The plan includes criteria by which leaders will judge success, together with an overview of how the progress of actions is checked. As a model for this, the school is using its well established systems for monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching. However, this approach is not fully documented within the plan. Additionally, the school would benefit from greater external verification and examples of good practice in other schools.

The headteacher has taken full responsibility for the school's situation and is driving improvements with determination. He says that this is improving students' safety as well as better preparing them for adult life. Senior leaders are clear on the aspects they are leading and are exhibiting strong team work in order to set the foundations for improvement. A suite of new safeguarding policies is in place. These include guidance for students on the safe use of the internet. Older students spoke with intelligence and maturity about the benefits of the new strategies they have received on how to stay safe online. Staff and students spoke highly of the detailed training they have received about the dangers of radicalisation. They spoke with confidence about their knowledge of how to recognise tell-tale signs and how to report them. To support this work, the school is now working in partnership with the Metropolitan police and the local authority. For example, local authority officers have led workshops with staff on how to recognise and prevent extremism. These have helped to raise awareness further and shape the school's actions to safeguard students.

Students like the new arrangements for mixed playgrounds and social areas. They say that these mirror real life. However, both they and school leaders recognise that this is the first step and that the arrangements need developing further. The school council is actively helping school leaders with this. There are plans for them to work with an external consultant to design new activity areas. The strength of such joint working is palpable across the school and is helping to maintain the rapid pace of improvement. Sixth form students said the new 'swipe-card' system for registering their attendance in school is making them feel safer. As one student exemplified, 'If there were a fire, the school would know exactly who was on site and keep us safe.'

Together, the new Chair and Vice Chair are bringing firm leadership to the governing body. The review of governance is well underway and the initial report is due

imminently. New arrangements for ensuring governors are well informed about the work of the school are in place. These include linking individual governors to subjects and key areas. A programme for the review of policies has been set up, using guidance provided by the Department for Education. Governors now feel that they are more able to tackle and bring challenge to all aspects of school life. However, governing body systems for robustly checking that statutory safeguarding requirements are met are not yet established. This should be attended to as a matter of priority.

The local authority is providing appropriate support to the school through its consultants and advisers. The regular improvement group meetings are enabling them to both track and challenge school leaders in the implementation of the school's action plan. However, the local authority's statement of action is too short term. It does not show the medium and longer term support for the school or the independent evaluation of impact. Too much reliance is placed on the school's own monitoring systems, with insufficient independent evaluation of the effectiveness of actions or their support. The statement of action details the arrangements for informing parents through, for example, the school forum and newsletters. However, beyond the initial parents and carers meeting which took place in November and the school forum, the local authority has not ensured that all parents are kept fully informed of the actions taken and the impact these are having.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint newly qualified teachers to any department before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Tower Hamlets and the Diocese of London. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector