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Anna Martin
Principal
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Dear Mrs Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Magnus Church of England Academy

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 January 2017. 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:

- develop the school's literacy strategy to encourage pupils' sustained writing skills
- develop a governing body strategy to promote positive parental engagement
- track and monitor more robustly the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities from their different starting points.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, your mentor, members of the governing body, subject leaders, leaders of the sixth form, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the leader in charge of achievement and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the academy trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation document and the school's action plan were evaluated. In addition, I examined the school's information about the pupils' performance and other monitoring documents. I visited a number of classes with the deputy headteacher and leaders of the sixth form.

Context

Since the last inspection, the head of the sixth form has been appointed. A leader in charge of the pupil premium funding has been appointed and is due to take up post in September. An external review of the pupil premium spending has been commissioned and is due to take place in the summer term.

Main findings

You have taken swift action to tackle the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection. You are a strong leader and, as such, have enabled the senior leadership team to deliver clear and unequivocal messages about your high expectations. The senior leadership team has been refreshed by new appointments and has implemented new strategies to improve teaching, behaviour and pupils' outcomes. Your self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and the plans to improve the school are well put together and appropriate. The way you have restructured the leadership team's roles and responsibilities provides for a more coherent line management structure than previously.

Many of the strategies implemented so far are making a demonstrable difference. For example, increased work with targeted pupils and their families has reduced the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school. Staff implement consistently the school's behaviour policy and this has reduced the number of pupils excluded from school for breaches of the school rules.

Subject leaders are improving their leadership skills. The range of professional development opportunities for them is wide ranging. Some have enrolled on middle leadership courses and many have visited good and outstanding practice elsewhere. Subject leaders have a comprehensive quality assurance programme. After observing teachers, they identify 'growth actions' (targets for teachers). These are reviewed regularly and are contributing to improved practice.

The curriculum has been thoroughly overhauled to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Subject leaders have devised 'threshold concepts', which describe the knowledge

and skills necessary to reach expected standards. They recognise that the most able pupils are still not achieving the expected standards and have made this a key focus of their monitoring and development work. Leaders are reviewing the current setting of pupils who speak English as an additional language to enable them to make even more progress.

The quality of teaching is improving and the leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is secure. The training and development opportunities for teachers have been increased. Teachers now have access to a range of information about pupils' needs and their progress. Many are using this information increasingly more effectively. For example, teachers now use their knowledge of individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses to pitch questions that offer just the right amount of challenge. Teachers' skills in assessing pupils' standards under the current framework are also improving as a result of work with other schools in a local teaching school alliance.

You have rightly prioritised the improvement of pupils' writing skills, as this was identified as a key weakness at the last inspection. The literacy coordinator's recent pilot strategy has led to marked improvements in some pupils' writing skills in a range of subjects. Further work to embed these strategies is now necessary to sustain improvements, especially in pupils' extended writing skills.

Improved teaching is making a difference to pupils' outcomes. You have taken reasonable steps to ensure the reliability of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Current achievement information suggests that the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving in key subjects. The difference in the attainment of these pupils compared with others is now diminishing. Similarly, the progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is accelerating. Recommendations from the recent special educational needs external review have been acted upon by the SENCo. For both these groups of pupils, however, the school does not rigorously track their progress from their different starting points. Consequently, effective additional support to accelerate their progress is not always implemented quickly enough.

Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is orderly and calm. I did not observe any off-task behaviour. Teachers engender trust and respect. Pupils' attitudes and motivation have improved as a result of better-quality teaching.

New leaders of the sixth form have made a positive difference to the provision in this part of the school in a short period of time. They have a clear vision to improve students' outcomes by ensuring that they are on the right courses and have access to high-quality teaching and support. Actions taken so far have improved curriculum choices for students and teaching. The head of the sixth form has devised a range of opportunities for students to share their views about their sixth form experience in response to recommendations from the previous report.

The governing body is now more effective than at the time of the last inspection. A restructuring of committees and governor responsibilities has enabled a more systematic approach to monitoring the school. The chair of governors has a clear grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors have wisely drawn on the practice of other styles of governance from other schools. The governing body has not yet devised a strategy to improve parental engagement, although leaders of the school have promoted a range of community liaison activities. Governors have appointed a pupil premium leader to implement the action plan to support disadvantaged pupils.

External support

The CEO of the academy trust provides you with sound guidance and clear direction. The trust has taken prudent steps to commission the external review of the pupil premium funding from a provider with strong credentials. The mentor appointed to support you as part of the talented leaders programme is providing you with valuable tools and strategies to help you lead others more effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector