

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Zahida Hammond
Headteacher
Saint Peter's Catholic Voluntary Academy
Normanby Road
South Bank
Middlesbrough
TS6 6SP

Dear Mrs Hammond

Special measures monitoring inspection of Saint Peter's Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit with Steven Shaw, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 6 and 7 December 2017, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Diocese of Middlesbrough, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Redcar and Cleveland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Darren Stewart
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, in order to accelerate pupils' progress by:
 - raising the expectations of all members of staff
 - ensuring that teachers make effective use of assessment information to inform their planning
 - improving planning so that topics are explored in more depth and detail
 - employing strategies that engage and motivate pupils more consistently
 - ensuring that teachers provide more effective support for lower-attaining pupils across key stage 3, so that they make rapid progress and secure basic skills in literacy and numeracy
 - consistently correcting errors in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar across the curriculum.
- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
 - establishing appropriate structures that provide effective line management and clear lines of accountability
 - holding middle leaders accountable for delivering rates of progress in line with the school's targets
 - using assessment information smartly to identify pupils making slower progress and providing them with additional support that helps them to catch up
 - checking on the quality of teaching more assiduously and providing teachers with precise feedback on how to improve their practice
 - strengthening the curriculum for teaching British values, so that pupils are more fully prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning and their confidence to participate in lessons.
- Implement a strategy to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, particularly those who miss school more regularly.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 6 to 7 December 2017

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher, the two newly appointed vice-principals, the chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the local management board. Inspectors also met with middle leaders, a group of staff and a group of support staff. They met formally with three groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in class and around the school. They observed teaching and learning in a wide range of classrooms and pupils' behaviour as they arrived at school and at break and lunchtimes.

Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including the trust's statement of action, the school's improvement plan, records of pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement, examples of leaders' monitoring activities and safeguarding documents. Inspectors considered the progress the school has made towards the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been several necessary changes in staffing at all levels, including middle and senior leadership. New governance arrangements are temporarily in place. The board of trustees is now the key group holding leaders to account for the performance of the school. This group works alongside a rapid improvement team (RIT) that has been set up to add further capacity, challenge and support. The RIT is a group of people with wide expertise and skills. They are using this shrewdly to hold leaders to account. The local management board has retained responsibility for the Catholic ethos of the school. The governance review is scheduled for the summer term.

The senior leadership team has been restructured and roles and responsibilities redesigned and clarified. Two new vice-principals have taken up post. One vice-principal has responsibility for learning and teaching and one vice-principal has responsibility for learning and progress.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher has worked tirelessly to ensure that the pace of change and improvement is appropriate and measured. Her decisive, strategic actions and resolute commitment to improving the quality of education and life chances for all pupils are beginning to have a positive impact. The headteacher is grateful for, and is welcoming of, the support that both pupils and parents have given her since her appointment in September 2016.

Most notably, changes at senior leadership level are having a positive impact, as this term two new vice-principals took up post. There is now greater clarity to senior leaders' roles and responsibilities. This much smaller, focused senior leadership

team is providing much-needed stability to the school and together they have a clear vision for improvement.

The trust's statement of action, complemented by the school improvement plan, are comprehensive documents. Both set out the key actions to take on the school's journey of improvement. Planned actions are specific, success criteria are clear and timescales are realistic and measurable. Senior leaders are providing greater clarity and communicating clearer expectations to all staff. The headteacher and two vice-principals now need to work with middle leaders so that the quality of teaching improves rapidly in their subject areas.

Pupils commented positively on the difference the headteacher has made since her appointment. Pupils are aware of her high expectations. Pupils are grateful to their teachers and their efforts to help them achieve well. Pupils do, however, report concerns about the lack of consistency between teachers and in different subjects, particularly in mathematics. The headteacher and the two vice-principals are working with middle leaders and staff to ensure greater consistency across the school. All staff must now continue to play their part in this so that pupils' experiences are consistent and outcomes improve.

Staff are supportive of the headteacher and senior leaders. They say how they appreciate the clarity and how they understand why change is happening. Almost all middle leaders are supportive of the actions senior leaders take to improve standards and the overall quality of education that pupils receive. However, disappointingly, a minority of middle leaders are the barriers to improvement because they are yet to acknowledge the benefit and importance of their role in ensuring that pupils get a good-quality education.

Senior leaders' sharper focus on improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils demonstrates that the school is without a doubt on a journey of improvement. Senior leaders are monitoring closely the quality of teaching through, for example, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. This is providing them with valuable information to address any areas of underperformance. As a result of this monitoring, weaker teaching is tackled quickly and appropriate support put in place.

Leaders have recently reviewed the school's assessment procedures. While leaders acknowledge that there is still work to do on this important area of the school's work, there is a concerted effort by all to ensure that pupils' assessments and assessment information are accurate and of a high quality, so that teachers' planning improves.

Leaders are providing tightly focused professional development opportunities for all staff. These opportunities focus on improving the quality of teaching. Staff appreciate such opportunities and they appreciate being able to share ideas and practice. Leaders continue to provide effective support for newly qualified teachers and trainee teachers.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

There are signs that the quality of teaching is improving. However, it continues to be variable across the curriculum. The vast majority of teachers are working hard to improve pupils' learning and experiences and most are willing to engage positively in professional development opportunities to improve their practice.

The leadership of teaching and learning is a strength. Leaders are more rigorously monitoring the quality of teaching across the school and holding staff to account for the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms. Leaders are very much aware where weaker practice exists and have initiated appropriate support plans.

More teachers now have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and, because of this, teachers are willing to reflect and adapt their planning so that it is beginning to meet pupils' needs and engage them in their learning. Teachers' skills in questioning vary. This is because some teachers simply question to gauge a basic understanding of an idea or concept; however, where questioning is much stronger, it is because the teacher insists on a more developed or extended response from pupils. For example, this skilful questioning was observed in English, history, art and religious education.

In some cases, teachers are not clear enough about what success looks like and therefore planned activities do not lead to gains in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Work observed in pupils' books also demonstrates this.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' recent introduction of a new behaviour policy is continuing to embed more consistent and rigorous expectations across the school so that learning is maximised. Leaders acknowledge that the new policy will remain under constant review and evaluation until it is working as effectively as possible.

In the main, pupils' attitudes to learning are positive, and when necessary, most teachers use effective classroom management strategies to ensure that pupils do not disrupt the flow of learning.

Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe, they enjoy coming to school and behaviour is improving. Pupils did mention that some inconsistencies remain between staff when using the new behaviour policy, although leaders are aware of and addressing this to ensure consistency.

Relationships between pupils are positive. In lessons, when asked, they support each other in their learning and cooperate with each other well. Pupils are polite. They are courteous to visitors and their conduct between lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime is calm and orderly. Staff supervise pupils well and this allows staff to reinforce standards and expectations. Pupils wear their uniform with pride and it makes them all look very smart.

Pupils say that, if bullying happens, they are confident that they have an adult to speak to about it, although some were more confident about this than others. Pupils are aware of, and talk confidently about, values such as respect and tolerance, and how these values are part of the school's daily ethos. Improved work to raise pupils' awareness of British values is taking place and it is being evaluated in an ongoing manner. Work so far indicates that this is developing pupils' spiritual and moral skills effectively; however, leaders acknowledge there is still work to do to improve pupils' cultural awareness.

Pupils' attendance remains a stubborn issue and therefore a concern for leaders. A key area of concern at the last inspection was the attendance of disadvantaged pupils. As a result of this, leaders have put in place several strategies to improve attendance this year. At this stage, there are early signs of impact where specific pupils have been targeted.

Outcomes for pupils

Provisional outcomes for pupils in 2017 demonstrate an improvement in the overall progress 8 score for all pupils, but a decline for disadvantaged pupils.

The pupil premium external review, commissioned by the school, was undertaken in October 2017. The report is a detailed document and provides clear recommendations, contextualised to the school, of what leaders need to do to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders are acting swiftly and decisively to implement a strategic plan that improves and sustains long-term improvements in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Teachers are now using seating plans to raise their awareness of groups of pupils in their classes, and there is some evidence that teachers are planning to meet the needs of, and raise aspirations of, disadvantaged pupils.

Current Year 11 pupils have been prioritised by leaders and are being given additional support and opportunities to cover lost ground from historical weaker teaching at key stage 3. They are appreciative of this extra help. Leaders are coordinating and monitoring a wide range of support opportunities to help these pupils improve and to prepare them for their summer 2018 examinations.

All pupils are now set challenging targets and leaders are now in a position to track pupils' progress against these targets. Leaders are currently undertaking a significant amount of work to ensure the accuracy of pupils' assessments so that, when assessment information is captured, pupils can access appropriate intervention should they fall behind in a subject.

During the monitoring visit, current pupils' assessment information was being captured, and therefore this will be an area of focus for the next monitoring visit.

External support

The school has brokered both formal and informal support from various sources. These include the Talented Leaders and Future Leaders programmes, Dixons Academies Trust, Outwood Grange Academies Trust and the Diocese of Middlesbrough.

This support has been effective in providing opportunities for staff to visit other establishments to gauge and share good practice and to learn from other professionals.