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19 January 2018

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

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Peter Dunmall, Ofsted Inspector, and Susan Derrick, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 17 and 18 January 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 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 March 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 school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

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 governing body, the chair of the Dominic Barberi multi-academy company, 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 first monitoring inspection on 17 January 2018 to 18 January 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting head of school, senior leaders, staff and pupils. Meetings were held with members of the local governing body, directors of the Dominic Barberi multi-academy company (DBMAC) and the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone to an officer from the local authority. Inspectors considered parents' and carers' responses on Parent View and other correspondence from parents. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects and year groups in the primary phase, secondary school and sixth form. Inspectors considered a range of documentation provided by the school related to the work of DBMAC, governance and pupils' progress. Inspectors checked pupils' attendance and reviewed incidents of fixed-term and permanent exclusions since the section 5 inspection.

During this monitoring inspection, inspectors focused closely on the school's work to improve safeguarding, pupils' behaviour and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Future monitoring inspections will also focus on the impact of the school's work to tackle bullying, the impact of the pupil premium funding and the progress of particular groups of pupils, including the most able.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, 35 teaching and support staff have left the school. There have been 22 appointments to the school, of which 16 are teachers. At the time of this monitoring inspection, the substantive principal and vice principal were on leave and absent from the school. The assistant principal appointed in September 2017 is currently acting head of school, as from January 2018. The former head of sixth form is currently acting deputy headteacher. From January 2018, some existing school leaders have stepped up to more senior positions or have taken on different responsibilities. An executive principal with responsibility for overseeing the school has been appointed by the DBMAC board. A national leader of education (NLE) was appointed shortly after the section 5 inspection to support school leaders.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Arrangements for safeguarding, the management of behaviour and pupils' conduct have improved since the section 5 inspection in March 2017. These improvements have been brought about through the determination of senior school leaders and staff, despite recent changes to senior leadership roles and continuing weaknesses in the multi-academy company leadership.

The school is a safer, happier and more orderly place than at the time of the last inspection. Much of this positive change is down to the resilience, commitment and sheer hard work of all staff who work directly with pupils.

The recently appointed acting head of school has brought a calm and unflappable demeanour to whole-school leadership. The leaders responsible for safeguarding have had a significant impact in a very short time. Leaders who are responsible for monitoring teaching and learning are beginning to identify precisely what needs to improve. New approaches to managing behaviour have been introduced and refreshed this term.

The designated leader for safeguarding (DSL), who is also the head of the primary school, has completely overhauled the school's safeguarding and child protection systems. The impact of this change is immediately noticeable. Staff are confident in the new safeguarding procedures and believe that pupils are safe in school. Pupils agree and told inspectors that they feel secure and protected on the school site. Staff are reassured by a streamlined and well-managed system that enables them to report their concerns promptly if they are worried about a pupil. The new arrangements enable the DSL to oversee patterns of concern and potential risks of harm to pupils.

Safeguarding in the school has been further strengthened by training for deputy DSLs and pastoral managers who work closely with pupils and their families. In addition, the DSL does not shirk from tackling any allegations against staff and taking appropriate action quickly and openly, with the best interests of pupils in mind. She has wisely built up close and mutually respectful relationships with Oxfordshire local authority and other agencies who work to protect children. Local authority officers have reviewed the improved safeguarding arrangements in the school and found them to be secure, with examples of strong practice.

Although there have been undeniable improvements to safeguarding, behaviour and morale of staff, there are considerable weaknesses at the level of governance and the multi-academy company. These weaknesses have the potential to put the good work of school staff and the pace of improvement in jeopardy. A review of governance was commissioned in July 2017 by the DBMAC, following the section 5 inspection. Among several points for improvement, the review recommended that directors and governors focused more precisely on the school and ensured that there was greater accountability. However, following the review, the DBMAC and governing body have been slow to improve their effectiveness. It is understandable that directors' decisions about senior leadership are sensitive, but other statutory duties of the governing body and the company have been neglected.

For example, the school improvement plan, submitted after the section 5 inspection, was judged not to be fit for purpose. At the time of the monitoring inspection, the plan was still not good enough. Directors and governors have not taken enough responsibility for ensuring that leaders strategically map out the key priorities for

improving the school. Nor have directors and governors demonstrated how they will evaluate improvements by their impact on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. In short, it is not clear that directors and governors know how to judge what is working in the school and what is not.

Following the section 5 inspection, a review of the pupil premium was carried out. During this monitoring inspection, leaders were able to provide convincing evidence that pupil premium spending in the primary phase was having a positive impact on pupils' progress and well-being. Disappointingly, leaders are not able to provide an equally convincing account of how pupil premium funding is being spent to raise standards for pupils in the secondary phase. It is unacceptable that directors of the company and those responsible for governance are not able to account for the spending of a significant amount of public money.

In addition, DBMAC and governors have not done enough to maintain good levels of communication with parents or involve them more closely in the school's drive for improvement. In this way, leaders at the highest level are not directly helping to restore the school's reputation in the local community.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As behaviour in and out of lessons has improved, so have pupils' attitudes to learning. In response, teachers are more confident about insisting upon higher expectations of pupils.

Across the whole school, it is clear that pupils want to learn. During the monitoring inspection, it was encouraging to see pupils on their best behaviour, keen to be diligent and trying hard to be polite, friendly and welcoming. The trust that pupils place in their teachers and other staff is tangible and humbling, especially in the context of such a turbulent time. However, many pupils lack confidence as learners and are overly dependent on staff, even when the work is easy. Some teachers do not know their pupils' ability and starting points well enough to set tasks at just the right level of challenge. As a result, time is sometimes wasted because pupils just do not know how to make a good start on a task.

Where teaching is most successful, it encourages pupils to ask and answer questions. Students in the sixth form, in particular, use their previous knowledge with increasing confidence and assurance.

Leaders are focusing on ensuring that teachers adopt a consistent approach to feedback, in order to raise standards. However, leaders have not taken enough account of what difference they are hoping feedback will make and whether it will unnecessarily increase teachers' already challenging workload. In other words, there is not enough focus on ensuring that pupils will work harder than their teachers. For example, during the inspection, pupils showed inspectors books with gaps and unfinished tasks with only cursory reminders from teachers to catch up. This

haphazard approach is not helping pupils to achieve their full potential.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour has improved since the section 5 inspection. Following the inspection, a revised code of behaviour and set of expectations were launched. A new uniform has been introduced and there are stricter rules imposed on the use of mobile phones in order to combat bullying and minimise distractions. Pupils look smarter and are rising to the challenge of higher expectations.

There are visible reminders of the 'ready, respectful, safe' behaviour code around the school, although inspectors did not see this being referred to enough during the inspection. In general, relationships between pupils and staff are warm, respectful and business-like. Inspectors were pleased to note that there were few instances of low-level disruption during the monitoring inspection. Pupils confirmed that behaviour has improved and that fewer lessons are interrupted by unacceptable behaviour.

However, staff told inspectors that some momentum was lost towards the end of the autumn term and some aspects of the behaviour management system were not followed through consistently. The new senior leader in charge of behaviour, appointed at the beginning of January 2018, reviewed the behaviour policy and introduced prompt consequences for misdemeanours. It is too soon to evaluate the full impact of the changes, but staff and pupils certainly feel more confident that misbehaviour will be followed up quickly.

There have been improvements to the use of the isolation room. The space has been redesigned, with the introduction of individual cubicles. Staff insist that pupils do not waste time, but complete useful work when placed in isolation. Previous poor practice regarding fixed-term exclusions and restrictive physical intervention has been tackled, with a reduction in the use of physical restraint. Staff have been trained in de-escalation techniques and the use of restorative justice to help pupils to make amends when they misbehave.

Attendance has been slow to improve. This disappointing outcome is in spite of the work of the attendance officer's tireless work with families and detailed analysis of patterns and trends. Registers are taken lesson by lesson and any unexpected absences are checked by the attendance officer. As with other aspects of the strategic leadership of the school, not enough is done with the information provided by the attendance officer. There is no clear strategy in the school improvement plan for reducing casual and persistent absence. Good attendance is not a high enough priority in the school.

However, attendance has improved in the sixth form, where a firm line has been taken with students who are late and those who miss sessions unnecessarily. These students have to catch up in specially arranged intervention sessions and as a

result, their non-attendance and lateness have reduced significantly.

During this inspection, inspectors saw no pupils wandering without permission, compared with the previous inspection. Sixth formers appreciate having key fobs to enable them to get to and from lessons around the site in an age-appropriate way; at the same time, they feel safe with the improved security of gates and fences. Nevertheless, inspectors saw pupils arriving late to lessons in the secondary school; they were reprimanded and sanctions applied, but punctual habits are taking a long time to be established. Pupils themselves told inspectors that they do not appreciate their learning being 'unsettled' by late arrivals of their peers. Pupils are not punctual enough and although there has been some improvement in this area, it is still not good enough.

It is encouraging to see that the number of pupils on part-time timetables has reduced considerably, but there are still pupils who are not receiving sufficient tuition. For some of the part-time pupils, there is no clear plan about increasing their provision so that they can be better prepared for the next stage of their education.

Outcomes for pupils

There has not been sufficient time since the section 5 inspection to see a significant improvement in pupils' progress. The legacy of inadequate behaviour and leadership continues to hold back standards. GCSE results remain similar to those from 2016, showing little improvement in rates of progress or levels of attainment.

Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils, but as progress overall is not high, this is not a strength. Outcomes at key stage 1 in the primary school are more positive, with higher than national scores in the phonics screening check and rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics that are in line with national figures.

There is a better picture in the sixth form where results remain strong in 2017, reflecting the better quality of teaching, learning and behaviour in this phase. Students from the sixth form seen during the monitoring inspection are achieving well in their studies. They are well prepared for their final examinations and the next stage of their education.

At present, leaders are not doing enough to track progress from year to year in order to identify pupils who need to catch up. Improvements to the school are not being measured by their impact on outcomes for pupils.

External support

The appointment of an executive principal by the company and national leader of education (NLE) to support the strategic oversight of the school have brought experience and some educational expertise. Both leaders are providing informal

coaching support for the acting head of school. It is too soon to judge the full impact of their support for leadership.

However, the support commissioned by the DBMAC is not sufficient to build capacity and establish a common sense of purpose for the school. For example, important decisions about leaders' roles and the priorities for the future are not being made on the basis of a thorough review of the school's performance. Instead, decisions are being made on an ad hoc basis, relying upon the goodwill and integrity of current school leaders.

Further oversight of the school's improvement has been provided by the director of education for the archdiocese, who has carried out regular visits to the school. The Department for Education has also carried out a monitoring visit to the school since the section 5 inspection. All parties acknowledge that the school has improved, but that some time was lost during the period immediately following the section 5 inspection. It is clear that the pace of improvement needs to increase.

Directors, governors and school leaders must:

- ensure that the school improvement plan is fit for purpose, sufficiently detailed, based on a thorough review of the actions taken so far and measured by its impact on pupils' behaviour, attendance and outcomes
- provide a thorough and convincing account of the impact of the pupil premium and other funding.