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Mrs Lisa McVeigh
Principal
Samworth Church Academy
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Dear Mrs McVeigh

Short inspection of Samworth Church Academy

Following my visit to the school on 9 May 2018 with Kathryn Hardy, Ofsted Inspector, and Christine Horrocks, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2015.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

Since your appointment as principal in September 2017, you have started to act quickly and with determination to address the issues that led to a decline in standards since the last inspection. You have accurately assessed what needed to be done and have brought a real sense of clarity and direction to the school. At the same time, you have sustained the strengths in the ethos of the school.

Leaders are aware of the school's weaknesses and acknowledge that improvement is needed in a number of areas. Consequently, senior and middle leaders have set about implementing changes since the beginning of the academic year to make the necessary improvements. However, many of these changes are recent and have not yet been fully embedded. Therefore, they have not yet had the opportunity to fully impact. Furthermore, there is still work to do to ensure that the initiatives that leaders have introduced are being applied by all staff consistently on a day-to-day basis.

Pupils' overall progress declined since the previous inspection and was significantly below average in 2015 and 2016. In 2017, GCSE examination results improved and, overall, pupils made progress broadly in line with the national average. There was underachievement in a number of subjects and by some groups of pupils.

A large number of pupils, staff and parents and carers recognise the positive changes you have made since your appointment. In particular, several said that behaviour has improved and pupils make more progress in lessons as a result. However, there is still more to do to create greater consistency in the way that behaviour is managed. Relationships are harmonious, and we saw examples of pupils working collaboratively in lessons, discussing their ideas with enthusiasm.

Although you have not yet formally joined the Southwell and Nottingham Diocese Multi-Academy Trust, it is providing effective support to the school. In particular, the secondary improvement director and the chief executive officer have made regular visits, and their expertise has helped you make beneficial changes. Governors also provide you with useful support. They bring a range of skills and experience to the work of the school, and you welcome the challenge they provide.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included establishing the effectiveness of leaders' actions to raise the achievement of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, and in key subjects. We looked at the progress you have made in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the school's last inspection. We also considered the extent to which absence and exclusions are reducing, and whether safeguarding is effective. These lines of enquiry are considered below.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Systems to check that adults that work at the school are suitable to work with children are appropriate. Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training to ensure that their knowledge is kept up to date. Staff understand the procedures they must follow if they have concerns about a pupil.

Pupils are safe and cared for well. Pupils with whom inspectors spoke explained that they know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils are well informed about what they can do to keep themselves safe. Pupils also said that bullying is rare and, if it occurs, it is generally dealt with well by staff. The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies to support pupils and make sure that they are kept safe.

Inspection findings

- At the last inspection, inspectors asked the school to ensure that pupils are provided with greater challenge. This has been, and remains, a key priority in the school's improvement plans, and teachers have received extensive training to help improve their skills in this area. While the school recognises that there is more to be done, pupils are being provided with a more appropriate level of challenge in lessons. The majority of pupils who responded to the pupil survey said that they feel challenged in lessons all or most of the time.

- The previous inspection report also called for improvements in the sixth form and, in particular, the number of students successfully completing their courses. As well as changing the leadership arrangements, the courses on offer in the sixth form have been reviewed and there is now a much wider range of courses that are better suited to the needs of the students. As a result, outcomes and retention rates have improved. A sign of the success of the changes made is the significant increase in the number of students opting to stay on in the sixth form now compared to the time of the last inspection.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have taken action to ensure that teachers are using more consistently the school's procedures for marking and assessment. Consequently, pupils more regularly receive the information they need to help them make improvements to their work, and time is more routinely used to enable pupils to respond to their feedback and improve their learning.
- Pupils' literacy skills are developed in a range of ways. The school is providing pupils with more opportunities to read widely and often in a range of subjects. The quality of the fiction books in the learning resource centre has been vastly improved and, as a consequence, more pupils are borrowing the books.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not achieved as well as other pupils nationally in GCSE examinations. Leaders have reviewed their approaches to the spending of the pupil premium funding and now use the money much more effectively. For example, the support for disadvantaged pupils has been more carefully managed this year. As a result of the school's actions, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been improving, particularly at key stage 3. However, the school recognises that there is still more work to be done to ensure that these pupils' progress moves even closer to the national average.
- While, in 2017, pupils' overall progress was broadly in line with the national average, progress was below average in some key subjects. These subject areas included English, science, languages and humanities. Progress in mathematics was stronger than for other subjects. Action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching, and this is having some impact. For example, the school is better at identifying and sharing best practice, enabling stronger departments and teachers to support the weaker ones. However, the quality of teaching across the school is still inconsistent.
- Pupils' attendance has been below the national average, and persistent absenteeism (pupils with attendance lower than 90%) significantly higher than that seen nationally. Therefore, improving attendance has been a priority for the school. The pupils with the lowest attendance often have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged. The school has introduced a wide range of strategies to tackle poor attendance but, to date, these have had only limited impact. Many of the actions are relatively new, and, as a consequence, it is too soon to see their full impact. Nevertheless, attendance remains a priority for leaders, particularly that of some pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged.
- Previously, the school has excluded a higher proportion of pupils than seen

typically. Several new approaches have been introduced to reduce the number of exclusions, and these have had a positive impact. The number of exclusions has reduced considerably this academic year for all groups of pupils. Even so, they remain higher than average, particularly for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or who are disadvantaged.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they work with team leaders to improve teaching in subjects where it is weaker, so pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects throughout the school
- they use the pupil premium funding more effectively to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils
- they continue to take action to improve pupils' attendance and reduce the number of exclusions, particularly for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or are disadvantaged.

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 County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Boyd
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and other senior leaders. I spoke with the chair of the governing body on the telephone. Inspectors visited a number of subject areas with senior leaders to observe teaching and to look at pupils' work. They met with groups of pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks on staff. The team reviewed attendance records and examined a range of other documentary evidence, including that relating to the ongoing self-evaluation, and data on pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspectors considered the views of 71 parents through their responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and Ofsted's free-text service. They considered the 41 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the 97 responses to Ofsted's survey for pupils.