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23 May 2018

Sean Tucker
Acting Head of School
St Gregory the Great Catholic School
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Oxford
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Dear Mr Tucker

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Ann Fearon and Patricia Wright, Ofsted Inspectors to your school on 2 to 3 May 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in March 2017. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The multi-academy company's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the academy does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local academy committee, 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 second monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 May 2018

Evidence

Inspectors reviewed plans to improve the school and met with senior leaders and the national leader of education (NLE) who is currently supporting the acting head of school. Inspectors also met members of the local academy committee and the executive principal. Meetings were held with groups of staff and pupils from the primary, secondary and post-16 phases of the school. Inspectors visited lessons in all phases to observe pupils learning and speak to them about their work. Pupils were observed during lunchtime. Inspectors reviewed the school's records related to safeguarding, behaviour and pupils' attendance. The school's information about current pupils' progress and attainment was considered alongside a sample of their work.

Context

Since the last inspection, four teachers have left the school. Changes have been made to senior leadership roles and responsibilities. Following the last monitoring inspection, the chair and vice-chair of the local academy committee resigned from their posts. In March, a new chair and vice-chair were elected to lead the governance of the school. During this monitoring inspection, inspectors were informed that the principal and vice-principal, who had been in post at the time of the section 5 inspection in March, had taken the decision to step down from leading the school. Parents and carers were informed of this decision on the day after this monitoring inspection.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The school is not improving quickly enough. Members of the previous local academy committee have not ensured that the statement of action and plans to improve the school are fit for purpose. At the previous monitoring inspection in January 2018, Her Majesty's Inspector charged leaders to put together suitable plans before the second monitoring inspection. Disappointingly, at this monitoring visit, plans are still not fit for purpose. They do not show clearly how actions to improve the school are to be carried out and how improvements will be measured by their impact on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.

Key senior leaders, including the head of the primary sector and those responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and teaching, have not been involved sufficiently in the development of the school's action plan. As a result, it is not clear to staff and leaders what they are working for as a school. In addition, important decisions about leadership and changes to policies and practice are still being made on an ad hoc basis. Leaders have not based their decisions upon a deep and detailed review

of what is working and what is not. These leaders have not thought deeply enough about the purpose of plans to improve the school.

Leaders' roles and responsibilities at senior level are not well defined. The duties and accountability of the executive principal, the acting head of school and the NLE are not precisely laid out. Members of the newly restructured academy committee commented that these roles appeared to be 'cloudy'. The inspection team agreed. Existing senior leaders' duties have been changed and some teaching staff have been promoted to the leadership team. These changes are intended to increase capacity and strengthen leadership. However, the acting head of school, the NLE and the executive principal have not made clear what they are expecting leaders to achieve and how their work will be evaluated. Nor have leaders taken enough account of the workload of some staff who now have several crucial areas to lead, together with a substantial teaching commitment. Credit is due to these senior staff, who have risen to the challenge of their increased responsibilities. They are unfailingly loyal to the school but some have become understandably frustrated by the lack of direction from the top.

Nevertheless, there are strengths in some aspects of leadership. For example, the acting head of school has maintained continuity and a calm presence in the school. The NLE has contributed to raising expectations and standards through her observations of teaching and learning. The acting deputy head of school has made an important contribution to the stability of the school through her experience, her knowledge of pupils and her thoughtful common sense.

The planned changes to the leadership of safeguarding have been successful. There are now three senior leaders taking responsibility for this vital part of the school's work. The head of the primary sector, the acting deputy head of school and an assistant headteacher work closely as a team. They are assiduous about sharing information and have ensured that the school's systems for reporting and recording concerns help to keep pupils safe. Staff know exactly how to raise concerns about pupils and do so in the full confidence that leaders will take effective and prompt action. Leaders of safeguarding have maintained purposeful and productive relationships with the local authority and other agencies who protect children. They are diligent about following up concerns and challenging other professionals if they think that there is not enough support for children and families.

Senior leaders responsible for improving behaviour in the school now have a more accurate picture of where misbehaviour occurs. They have provided useful analysis of incidents which some of the heads of year are using to target particular pupils and help them to improve. However, there is not a consistent approach throughout the school and its impact has been patchy.

Following the last monitoring inspection, leaders took account of the weaknesses identified in their review of the impact of pupil premium funding and they have made important improvements. The special educational needs coordinator and

other leaders responsible for the pupil premium have developed an effective strategy for spending this additional funding to support eligible pupils. There are now clear signs that additional funding is making a positive impact on pupils' progress and personal development.

Following the restructuring, the new chair of the local academy committee, together with new and experienced members, has brought wisdom and intelligence to governance. Members of the committee acknowledge the failures in the past and the current weaknesses in leadership. Although there has not been time for members to make any impact, their response to the findings from this monitoring inspection has been astute, honest and realistic.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the first monitoring inspection, teaching, learning and assessment continue to improve, but too slowly. Pupils' experience in lessons varies too much because teachers' expectations are not consistently high. Leaders who are responsible for monitoring and improving teaching are out and about frequently, observing pupils and checking on teaching. Their presence is valued by teaching staff and is reassuring for pupils. Leaders' evaluations of teaching, learning and assessment are accurate. Staff receive frequent feedback about their work and are provided with useful training and guidance. However, there is no coherent strategic plan for improving teaching. Leaders work hard at checking what teachers are doing but do not focus enough on what pupils are learning, how much progress they are making and the standards they are reaching.

Instead, leaders have focused on ensuring that pupils are set challenging targets and there is an expectation that all pupils will know what they are aiming for. Some teachers make effective use of pupils' targets to spur them on to try harder and reflect on how they are doing. However, teachers have not been supported properly in setting the right targets based on accurate assessment of pupils' abilities. In addition, some pupils can recite their targets when asked but do not understand what the targets really mean, particularly in key stage 3.

Nevertheless, pupils clearly want to learn and are happier with fewer disruptions in lessons. But they are not being helped to be more confident learners. Many pupils do not have the self-assurance or skills to ask and answer questions to help them make progress. Where pupils are more successful, teachers patiently prompt them to show that they are thinking carefully and support them to answer questions more fully. In these sessions, pupils are rightly rewarded for their responses and good work, which helps to foster positive attitudes and instil more confidence.

Teaching, learning and assessment in both the primary and sixth-form phases continue to be stronger than in the secondary phase of the school. The head of the primary sector has put together a coherent and detailed plan to make further improvements to teaching and pupils' progress in the primary school as the school

grows and pupils join Years 5 and 6 for the first time. In addition, the head of the primary sector has ensured that she has obtained appropriate external support to help her review the primary school's performance and develop the skills of her staff. A similar cycle of review and planning exists in the sixth form, where students report with confidence that they are being taught well and prepared thoroughly for their external examinations. It is disappointing that the same level of planning, insight and strategic thinking is not in evidence in the secondary school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' improved behaviour in most lessons has been sustained since the last monitoring visit. The atmosphere in many classrooms is orderly and focused. When pupils trust teachers to be consistent and fair, they try hard to concentrate and be respectful. Staff continue to feel secure about the way in which incidents are dealt with promptly. They are confident that no pupils 'fall through the net' if they misbehave and earn a detention. Pupils themselves are beginning to accept that they cannot argue their way out of making amends if they have behaved badly. However, pupils do not always behave well when their lessons are covered by supply staff or when there are changes to routines.

It is disappointing that behaviour out of class has not improved enough. Inspectors were very concerned about some unruly behaviour and disrespectful language at lunchtime and during lesson changeovers. Pupils did not respond promptly to the reasonable requests of staff to get to lessons on time. A few pupils ignored staff completely and were deliberately late. Senior staff had to investigate and deal with an incident of dangerous and provocative behaviour when informed by inspectors. Leaders acknowledge that there are continuing concerns about pupils' punctuality and casual approach to being on time to lessons. This concern was raised at the section 5 inspection in March 2017 and at the last monitoring inspection, but there are few signs of improvement.

Although the overall rates of serious incidents and exclusions have continued to decline since the section 5 inspection, there are still too many pupils repeating their time in the isolation room, with little real sign of improvement in their conduct. The school is rightly reviewing its use of internal isolation to manage pupils' behaviour.

Persistent absence continues to be a concern and has not improved. Overall attendance is below national figures in all phases of the school. As at the first monitoring visit, the attendance officer diligently collects information about pupils' absences, analyses the results and provides regular reports for senior leaders. However, not enough is done with this information. There is no clear plan of action to improve attendance for individuals, families or groups of pupils. The school's newsletters highlight the importance of good attendance and letters have been sent to families, but have had only a patchy impact. Pastoral teams know pupils and their families well, carry out home visits and have built up good relationships. However, because there is no coherent strategy for encouraging attendance, too

many pupils still do not attend school when they should.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils are not making enough progress. Standards remain too low and are not improving quickly enough. The school's assessment of how well pupils are doing is not consistently reliable. Pupils are set targets based on previous test scores and assessment results, but these are not fine-tuned or based on a sophisticated understanding of pupils' previous attainment or potential. During the inspection, leaders were not all able to show clearly that they knew precisely how current year groups are doing and there was some confusion about the most up-to-date progress information for current Year 11 pupils.

Pupils' work in books and folders reflects inconsistent teaching, expectations and assessment. Some pupils take great care of their books and folders, present them neatly and accumulate useful work for their revision. However, as at the first monitoring inspection, inspectors saw unfinished work and gaps in pupils' books that were not followed up by teachers. Staff are working very hard to provide additional classes and revision sessions for pupils in Years 11 and 13 and pupils are making the most of these. However, some pupils have a lot to catch up with because of the legacy of weak teaching and leadership.

Leaders and staff do not all have a good understanding of the different groups of pupils in the secondary school and how to ensure that their abilities are catered for. For example, the most able pupils are still not challenged enough, including those pupils who are also disadvantaged.

External support

School leaders have not sought sufficient external support and have remained too isolated. It is unacceptable that one year after the school was judged to require special measures, directors of the multi-academy company, senior school leaders and the executive principal have not fulfilled their statutory duties and ensured that a suitable improvement plan is in place. It is understandable that directors and committee members have felt constrained by leadership challenges. However, serious concerns remain about the slow pace of improvement and the lack of strategic leadership.

More positively, the head of the primary sector has taken the opportunity to work with a school improvement adviser from the diocese as part of her review of the school. In addition, the school has maintained its positive relationship with the local authority children's services, which is helping to ensure pupils' safety and well-being.

- The newly restructured academy committee must urgently ensure that a suitable

action plan to improve the school is in place, which outlines clearly:

- the roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels
- how improvements will be made, monitored and measured by their impact on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour
- how all leaders will be held to account for the impact of their work.