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Mr James Taylor
Headteacher
St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy
Oxford Road
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Dear Mr Taylor

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and members of your senior leadership team. I met with the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the chair of the trust intervention board, and the national leader of education (NLE) who is supporting the school. I also met with a group of middle leaders. I held a telephone conversation with the chair of the board of trustees.

I examined a range of documents, including the school improvement plan, the central record, which records recruitment checks on staff, the trust's statement of action, the school's self-evaluation, those documents relating to assessment information, behaviour records and attendance, as well as records of the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.

I visited lessons with the acting deputy headteacher who has responsibility for teaching and learning. During visits to lessons I scrutinised pupils' work. I talked to a group of pupils from Years 8, 9 and 10 and I met with a group of Year 12 students. I also spoke informally with pupils during lessons and morning break.

Context

Since the previous inspection, your post as acting headteacher has been made permanent. You have appointed an acting deputy headteacher to bring additional capacity to your senior leadership team. Your acting special educational needs coordinator has also been appointed on a permanent basis. You have appointed a new school business manager. From September 2018, you have appointed a history teacher, three English teachers and a health and social care teacher. After the last inspection the trust decided to remove all delegated powers from the academy council (governing body) and establish a trust intervention board with a new chair of governors. The NLE is also a member of the trust intervention board.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You and the trust have revised the school improvement plan to ensure that sufficient attention is given to the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The plan includes interim milestones to judge progress against. Although the plan is regularly reviewed, you agree that the plan needs to be evaluated with greater precision so that sufficient attention is given to the impact of actions taken. In particular, greater attention to the impact of actions to improve the progress and attainment of pupils is needed.

Since your appointment in September 2017, you have undertaken a full review of the school's systems and procedures. You, governors and the trust know what needs to be done to improve the school. You have reviewed the structure of your senior leadership team. As a result, you have made changes to ensure leadership responsibility for the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. However, the pace of improvement is not sufficient. Actions taken to date have not had enough impact on addressing the areas of weakness. Improvements to the quality of teaching, and pupils' attitudes to learning, have not been swift enough.

A review of how the school uses the additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils has not yet taken place. However, during the inspection you arranged a date for this review. A new plan is in place to support disadvantaged pupils. This plan identifies barriers faced by these pupils. The plan includes the main areas that need to be addressed to increase the impact of additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils in their learning. The actions are at an early stage and therefore it is too early to see the full impact of these. Although there has been some improvement in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils in Year 11, the progress of these pupils still lags behind that of their peers. You agree that the plan could be improved by ensuring more measurable success criteria.

Middle leaders are now being held more to account. Working with the NLE you have established more effective systems for middle leaders to check the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' outcomes. Middle leaders talk positively about the support they receive from you and other senior

leaders, including opportunities for more regular dialogue about pupils' progress. You acknowledge that there is still work to do with middle leaders to ensure consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching.

There are some signs that the quality of teaching is beginning to improve. However, the quality of teaching remains too variable. Pupils told me that they would like a wider variety of learning activities. Teachers do not consistently give pupils opportunities to develop their ideas and explanations, for example during class discussions. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are still too inconsistent. From scrutiny of the work in pupils' books it is noticeable that when teachers have high expectations of pupils, they rise to the challenge. However, where expectations are low pupils do not complete their work fully. Presentation and pride in their work also decline.

Your new acting deputy headteacher has plans in place to introduce a more bespoke professional development programme for teachers from September 2018. Currently, staff are beginning to share the best practice in teaching and learning, including working with specialist leaders in education. Middle leaders told me that this is helping to support teachers to assess pupils' work more accurately at key stage 4. However, the evaluation of the impact of teachers' professional development is currently a list of what has taken place, rather than the impact of professional development on improving the quality of teaching. Therefore, impact on improving the quality of teaching is limited at this time.

Improving pupils' attendance remains a main priority for the school. You, the trust and governors are aware that actions to improve attendance now need to show significant impact. Pupils' absence rates remain too high, especially in Year 10. The number of pupils regularly absent from school also remains too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Actions taken to date, such as attendance rewards and assemblies to raise the profile of attendance, have not had an impact on improving overall rates of attendance. However, some individual pupils' attendance has improved.

The management of attendance for pupils accessing alternative provision has improved. You now ensure daily pupil attendance updates from alternative providers. However, the attendance of pupils accessing education provision outside of school remains too low.

Since the previous inspection, sixth-form students' attendance has declined in both Year 12 and Year 13. New systems have now been put in place to improve the attendance of sixth-form pupils. However, it is too early to judge the impact. Leaders acknowledge that attendance targets for sixth-form students need to be more aspirational.

During the inspection I spoke to several pupils. They were polite and respectful in their discussions with me. They told me that there have been some improvements

in behaviour since the last inspection. For example, they say that senior leaders are now more visible in corridors. They talk positively about your regular presence around the school. They are also clear about the sanctions for poor behaviour. However, they told me that poor behaviour can still disrupt their learning, particularly in English. Pupils told me that the behaviour policy is still not implemented consistently by teachers. Nevertheless, school records do show a decline in the number of pupils removed from lessons and a slight decline in the number of fixed-term exclusions. Fixed-term exclusions remain below the national average.

You recognise that there is more work to do to improve behaviour in the corridors further. Pupils told me that they still hear the use of inappropriate language. Pupils also told me that bullying does not happen often. However, some pupils said that they feel that bullying incidents are not dealt with quickly enough at times. You have recently consulted with staff. As a result, you are implementing a revised behaviour policy from September 2018 to ensure that behaviour expectations of pupils are consistently applied by all staff.

The new trust intervention board challenges leaders and holds them to account. The trust intervention board knows that there is a need to accelerate actions to ensure more rapid improvement. The trust has commissioned support from a NLE, from an outstanding school, to work with leaders and to support you as a new headteacher to the school. The NLE has helped leaders to develop more effective systems to check the progress made by pupils. This is enabling middle leaders and teachers to identify more quickly pupils at risk of underachievement. Targets set for pupils have also been revised to ensure that they are more aspirational.

Due to the establishment of a new trust intervention board, a review of governance has not yet taken place. However, a review has been commissioned to take place early in the autumn term this year.

School information shows that Year 11 pupils are making better progress, including middle-prior-attaining pupils. Leaders acknowledge there is further work to do to ensure that teachers more accurately assess the progress of pupils in key stage 3.

At the previous inspection, some aspects of the school's website did not meet the Department for Education requirements of what schools must publish online. This was also the case at the start of this inspection. However, you addressed this by the end of the inspection.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Michele Costello
Her Majesty's Inspector