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Mrs Zahida Hammond
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Dear Mrs Hammond

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

Following my visit to your school on 12 and 13 December 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 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.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, 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 the quality of teaching more assiduously and providing teachers with precise feedback on how to improve their practice and the expectations of all members of staff
 - 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 12 December 2018 to 13 December 2018

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with staff in the school. The inspector observed teaching across a range of subjects and year groups, in all cases jointly with senior leaders. The inspector scrutinised the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan, the single central record and various documents relating to behaviour, exclusions, attendance, teaching and learning, and current pupils' assessment information. The inspector also carried out a review of work in books from a sample of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in English, mathematics and science, plus some other subjects selected by leaders. The inspector met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of new staff and two groups of pupils. The inspector met with the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the consultant secondary standards officer for the trust.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school has formally joined the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust (NPCAT). The trustees of NPCAT made the decision to remove the rapid improvement team (RIT). They have put in place a new interim academy board (IAB). The school continues to serve a community with a significantly higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than that seen nationally. At the end of the summer term, five staff left the school. In September 2018, six teaching staff and two support staff joined the school. All departments are stable in terms of staffing, at present.

Since September, a consultant secondary standards officer, appointed by the MAT, has been working with leaders in the school for two days a week. Two specialist leaders in education (SLEs) have been working one day a week to support work in the English and mathematics departments.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The strategies, previously in place to improve attendance, reduce fixed-term exclusions and accelerate outcomes for pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, have failed to secure much-needed rapid improvements. Nonetheless, the headteacher and other senior leaders have shown loyalty to the school. Their determination is evident as they have reflected on what did and did not work and, subsequently, implemented new strategies to inject a renewed sense of urgency and change.

The school improvement plan has been refined since the previous monitoring inspection. As a result, it contains more strategic detail, with clear, timely points for

measuring the impact of leaders' work. The priorities set, and actions for improvement to be undertaken, are appropriate and measurable. This is particularly important with regard to improving pupils' attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism.

The school's context is a complex one. It serves a significantly higher than national proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged. As a result, a substantial amount of funding is allocated to the school. The current pupil premium strategy plan for 2018/19 is a detailed document. Nevertheless, the plan is yet to be ratified by the IAB. While staff and leaders demonstrate an understanding of the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face, the plan is yet to be translated into a coherent, working strategy. This is needed to accelerate the rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils currently in the school.

Middle leaders continue to be held, frequently, to account for their work. This is particularly evident as they have a clearer grasp of strengths within the subject areas they lead, but also a realistic view of what needs to improve. They understand the high expectations conveyed by the trust and senior leaders. However, their impact and involvement in driving up standards and ensuring consistency in the quality of teaching continue to be variable. In some instances, the pace of improvement is nowhere near as evident as in others. Middle leaders responsible, for example, for English and mathematics, are proactive in influencing needed improvements in their subject areas. As a result, current pupils' progress in these important subjects is showing steady signs of improvement.

Directors of progress continue to develop and demonstrate some effective leadership skills. As a result, they can demonstrate how they are having an input into improving pupils' experiences. They have an accurate view of the barriers that some of the most vulnerable pupils face. Consequently, they have planned individual, targeted strategies for pupils, so that gaps in their learning can be plugged. However, how these strategies are implemented in classrooms is highly inconsistent. This lack of cohesion is hindering disadvantaged pupils' progress.

The board of trustees for the MAT made the decision, earlier in the term, to replace the RIT with an IAB. The IAB is formed from individuals that have wide-ranging skills and expertise. They are using these skills to increase the levels of accountability and challenge to the headteacher and other leaders. The understanding of members of the IAB is growing as they become involved in the life of the school. The governance structure currently in place is in line with the trust's scheme of delegation. Trust-wide systems are developing, so that appropriate support is being provided to the school. The CEO recognises that additional support is needed to support leaders in improving attendance and reducing persistent absenteeism and fixed-term exclusions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching across the school continues to show improvement. However, the road to consistency in pupils' experiences is a turbulent one. The strong system in place to monitor the quality of teaching continues to provide leaders with valuable information about strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. Feedback provided to teachers is specific and focuses on an area for development that will make the most improvement to their practice. If there are significant concerns about someone's performance, a coaching programme is put in place to support them and provide them with more intensive, constructive and professional dialogue.

Teachers' planning continues to have a structured approach. For example, the re-branded 'do now' activity continues to immediately engage pupils in their learning and provide them with opportunities to recall important learning. However, this activity sometimes offers the pupils no link or point of reference in the curriculum. This is evident, for example, in some pupils' books as they note down one-word answers with no detail or context.

Pupils show increased levels of engagement in their learning. This is because teaching is taking a more structured approach, so that no time is wasted and, in the main, expectations of what pupils can achieve are higher. This was particularly evident in Year 7 food technology, where pupils followed clear instructions safely, independently and excitedly to mix the ingredients for, and to bake, a Christmas yule log.

Some teachers are still do not routinely identify the needs of different groups of pupils. This is despite the work of leaders to provide them with specific strategies. Too many teachers are not utilising their skills well enough to make sure that pupils engage in learning that matches their needs. As a result of this, current pupils' progress remains variable. In some instances, there is no clear sequence of learning evident in pupils' work, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, as they progress through their programmes of study.

Teachers do not use questioning consistently enough to challenge pupils' thinking, particularly the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. However, there were examples observed, for example, in Year 9 science and Year 11 English and mathematics lessons, where questioning was used to prompt and probe pupils' understanding and ideas.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' attitudes to learning and levels of engagement, in the main, have soundly improved over the course of the different monitoring inspections. For example, pupils during this inspection who attended breakfast club, and the Year 7 and Year 8 pupils who participated in family dining, demonstrated the community ethos that

permeates the school. This was further exemplified as pupils confidently engaged in conversations with each other and staff. Also, some pupils took to the microphone and gave words of appreciation to their teachers, families and peers.

Pupils show respect to visitors. They are willing to participate confidently in discussions about the school and they make their views known.

Pupils acknowledge that, while some silly behaviour remains an issue, in the main, expectations and standards around behaviour have vastly improved over the course of the last 12 months. Pupils understand what is right and wrong. They understand that there are consequences to their actions and poor choices.

Pupils spoken to say how staff are approachable and care about them as individuals. Pupils feel as though they are part of a community and spoke about the school being a welcoming and friendly environment. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and respectfully. They show great pride in being part of the St Peter's family.

Attendance is a significant concern for leaders. The systems in place during the previous monitoring inspections demonstrated a positive impact for individual, identified pupils. However, overall, the global impact of these strategies has not brought about the much-needed and urgent improvements. Leaders expected better improvements, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders have been reflective and evaluated what did and did not work to improve attendance overall and for specific groups of pupils. Nonetheless, there is currently little evidence that leaders' recently renewed actions are having a significant, positive impact on improving pupils' attendance. For example, between September 2018 and the date of the monitoring inspection, persistent absenteeism rocketed to nearly a third of the school population being too frequently absent.

The newly appointed senior leader to oversee attendance, who also has responsibility for pupils with SEND, is well aware that her role is strategic. She has begun to initiate urgent strategies to overcome this significantly worrying issue. Notwithstanding, parents and carers and pupils must also play their role in ensuring that attendance to school improves.

As noted at previous monitoring inspections, fixed-term exclusions are reducing because of increased expectations and the use of the school's internal exclusion base. Current school information regarding fixed-term exclusions indicates that, in comparison with the same period in the previous academic year, fixed-term exclusions have marginally reduced, as has the use of the school's internal exclusion base. However, the use of fixed-term exclusion remains far too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. The proportion of pupils permanently excluded so far in this academic year is significantly above the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Despite additional support for pupils, Year 11 outcomes in 2018 indicate that pupils made inadequate progress from their broadly average starting points. This is evident across a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Girls progressed less well than boys. However, girls attained marginally higher than boys. Both groups of pupils progressed and attained less well than national averages.

Disadvantaged pupils' progress, including for the most able disadvantaged, is of grave concern. Allocated funding and strategies to accelerate these pupils' rates of progress have not been wholly successful. Therefore, they have made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally. While current disadvantaged pupils appear to be making better gains in their learning, teaching is too inconsistent. The use of strategies to improve disadvantaged pupils' progress is far too variable to enable them to make good progress.

The proportion of pupils staying in education, employment or training has improved and is now in line with the national average.

Senior leaders are realistic about the pace of change and there is an urgency to improve standards for pupils. However, leaders acknowledge that in some subjects, pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills still lag behind. Despite this, there is continuing evidence of senior leaders' ability to accurately gauge pupils' knowledge gaps through a systematic approach to assessing pupils' progress and learning over time.

Assessment information is becoming increasingly reliable. Middle leaders are routinely asked to analyse and explain what they have considered when they are checking on, and assessing, pupils' progress and learning. Current pupils' assessment information shows some improvement in pupils' progress. However, this improving picture is not always supported consistently in the variable sequence of learning evident in some pupils' books.

External support

The CEO of the MAT has provided additional funding to the school, so that regular support is available to leaders. This has been particularly helpful in supporting leaders to identify and affirm emerging areas of strength in the school and also areas that need urgent attention. There are plans in place for the MAT to support the school with further resources as of January 2019. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.