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18 February 2019

Mr David Hayes
Principal
The De La Salle Academy
Carr Lane East
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Dear Mr Hayes

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The De La Salle Academy

Following my visit to your school on 6 February 2019, 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 October 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I held meetings to discuss the school's improvement with you and other leaders; with three governors, including the chair of the governing body; with a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. I toured the school, accompanied by you. I evaluated the trust's statement of action and support plan, which incorporates the school's action plan. I examined other documents, including information about pupils' achievement and attendance. I also scrutinised the reviews of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium completed since the previous inspection.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to senior and middle leadership. Your senior leadership team has been joined by a new deputy head of school and an assistant headteacher, who was already a member of staff at the school. You have appointed three new faculty leaders, one of whom was also an existing member of staff. Other key members of staff have been appointed, so releasing more of senior leaders' time. For example, a site manager is now in post.

A number of members of staff have left the school, with some being replaced by new members of staff. A relatively large group of newly qualified teachers were appointed at the start of this school year.

You have broadened the curriculum by reintroducing art, food technology and geography. The reintroduction of geography was, in part, in response to pupils' clearly expressed wishes. This is one example of the way that you have given pupils a stronger voice in decisions about the school. This has also included ensuring that the pupils' academy council has more impact.

The governing body has been restructured. It has reduced in size and a new clerk has been appointed. Governors have been successful in moving towards resolving the school's financial difficulties.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You and other senior leaders provide the school with dedicated and determined leadership. You have a clear and honest understanding of where the school has already improved and what still needs to be done. The school's action plan included in the trust's statement of action identified key actions and who was responsible for ensuring that these happened. In addition, it clearly identified responsibilities for evaluating whether completed actions had made the expected improvement. The success of this plan has allowed leaders, including governors, to replace it with a more tightly focused plan for this school year. As with the earlier plan, you and other leaders carefully check that improvement is happening as expected. The school's improvement plans include all the areas identified as requiring improvement in the previous inspection.

Middle leadership has been strengthened since the previous inspection. Middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles. They have welcomed training they have received about how to fulfil their responsibilities. This has given them confidence in supporting and holding their subject-teacher colleagues to account. The school's faculty leaders form a coherent team.

Leaders have been more able to improve teaching and learning as a result of their tighter monitoring of teachers' work. The school continues to use an externally provided training programme for teachers about effective classroom practice. In

addition, leaders arrange for teachers to work together in small groups to consider each other's practice and seek ways to learn from each other. All of these have contributed to teaching and learning improving. When teachers' work does not match the standard required by the school, additional training and support is offered to bring about improvement. If this does not happen, further work with individuals is undertaken. Leaders are very carefully monitoring the group of newly qualified teachers who joined school this year to ensure that, when needed, they are supported to refine their skills and so provide effective teaching and learning for pupils.

One feature of teaching that has followed from the training provided is leaders' expectation of consistency in the way that teachers organise learning. Pupils now understand what to expect at different stages, as lessons progress. This gives them confidence. Leaders' most recent evaluation of teaching and learning shows that teaching is now of consistently higher quality. Furthermore, their plans also include a commitment that this should increase even more. The pupils I spoke to confirmed that teaching and learning continue to improve.

Leaders have strengthened the systems to encourage pupils to attend school properly. The attendance of all pupils and disadvantaged pupils has shown year-on-year increases in each of the last three school years. However, absence is still too high when matched to the national average, and particularly so when the absence of disadvantaged pupils is compared to other pupils across the country. Leaders have introduced better systems to encourage and reward regular attendance, for example by organising raffles for those with 100% attendance over specific periods of time. In addition, leaders ensure that pupils with continuing poor attendance and their families are strongly challenged.

Year 11 pupils in 2018 made more progress over their time in the school than similar pupils the year before. The school's own data, including comparisons of pupils' attainment and progress to those at the same stage in the previous year, gives leaders confidence that these gains will continue. However, the rate of improvement in pupils' progress remains too slow to ensure that pupils will do as well as they should, quickly enough. There are signs that disadvantaged pupils are improving their progress at a faster rate than are other pupils. However, the gaps between the attainment and progress of disadvantaged pupils and others remain far too wide. In general, younger pupils have fewer gaps to fill from unsuccessful learning in the past. Their achievement is stronger than older pupils'.

The school completed the review of its use of the pupil premium identified as necessary in the previous inspection. Part of the school's response has been to consider how to provide even more opportunities for extra-curricular activities and learning. During the week of this inspection, the school was having a particular focus on how visitors support Liverpool's economy. Staff increasingly use this kind of opportunity to broaden pupils' views and aspirations. The school's cadet force meets regularly and is growing in size. This is another example of the way the

school provides new and different kinds of opportunities for pupils.

The governing body has experienced further evolution since the previous inspection. Governors have agreed to reduce the size of the governing body to make it easier to have more detailed discussion about the school. The smaller governing body is due to meet for the first time very soon. The archdiocese is now represented on the governing body. The role of governors in challenging you and other leaders about the school's effectiveness has been enhanced by setting up a sharply focused education and standards committee. This committee has a national leader of governance as its chair. It has replaced the previous project group of external partners. The project group was established immediately after the school was judged to have serious weaknesses to provide additional challenge to the school to ensure rapid improvement. Governors have worked with the regional schools commissioner and the school's sponsors to consider the overall, long-term, strategic responsibility for school. The school is still seeking a way to ensure that it gains the benefit of being in a wider organisation than a single academy trust.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions 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 governing body, who is also the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector