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Mr Sean Tucker
Acting Head of School
St Gregory the Great Catholic School
Cricket Road
Cowley
Oxford
Oxfordshire
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Dear Mr Tucker

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Maxine McDonald Taylor, Her Majesty's Inspector and Andrew Foster, Francois Walker and Christopher Crouch, Ofsted Inspectors to your school on 6 to 7 March 2019, 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 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Having considered all the evidence I recommend that the academy may appoint up to three newly qualified teachers in the English, mathematics and humanities departments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, the executive

principal of the Dominic Barbieri Multi Academy Company, 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 that 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 that 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 6 to 7 March 2019

Evidence

Inspectors met with leaders to discuss the work being done to improve the school since the last monitoring inspection. Inspectors reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding and the school's checks on staff working in the school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons and reviewed their attendance and their rates of punctuality. They considered the school's records of exclusions and behaviour incidents. Inspectors scrutinised the work of the school improvement board and met with members and the executive principal. Meetings were held with senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils from all phases. A sample of pupils' work was scrutinised alongside work reviewed in lessons. Teaching and learning were observed in lessons throughout all phases of the school. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers of children in the primary phase when they dropped off or picked up their children. The 47 responses to Parent View, together with the school's own survey of parents and staff, were considered.

Context

Roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team and the school improvement board are as they were at the third monitoring inspection visit. Plans are still in place for the school to join the Pope Francis Catholic Multi Academy Company but no date for the move has been set.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Senior leaders continue to work with tireless determination to improve the school. Their efforts have ensured that the improvements in pupils' behaviour at the last monitoring inspection have been sustained and consolidated. Leadership of safeguarding remains strong in the school and child protection arrangements are secure. Senior staff and leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and what needs to improve further. They have acted on the findings from the last monitoring visit and put in place some promising systems to check progress and improvements.

A review of the pupil premium has now taken place. Weaknesses in the effectiveness of the use of funding and its impact on secondary pupils have been tackled. The quality of provision for eligible pupils is catching up with the good practice seen in the primary sector.

The reputation of the school locally is improving and parents are becoming more confident in the school and its leadership. The acting headteacher, together with his senior and middle leadership teams, has maintained stability in the school and built up staff's confidence.

However, there are remaining weaknesses that have the potential to slow the

school's progress down. The quality of teaching in the secondary phase is not improving at the same rate as other aspects of the school's work. There is no doubt that senior and middle leaders are energetically driving improvement and are introducing better practice than previously. However, there is not enough strategic focus from directors, board members and the acting headteacher on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Communication between the acting headteacher and the senior team is sometimes not direct enough and leaders feel that their work is not recognised as much as it should be. In addition, the acting headteacher's roles, duties and the impact of his work are not sufficiently clear to the senior team. Directors have not shared enough of their vision for the future of the school with senior leaders. As a result, leaders wonder where their good work and efforts are headed. This has created uncertainty and some tensions.

Governance of the school has improved overall. Members of the school improvement board have gained confidence in carrying out their statutory duties. The vice-chair of the board makes sure that he carefully oversees safeguarding in the school. Board members are beginning to acquire a much better understanding of how leaders are tracking and gauging pupils' progress and whether standards are high enough. However, there is not enough evidence of members' direct questioning about the quality of teaching and whether outcomes are improving and, if not, what is being done to make a difference.

Leaders in the primary sector continue to maintain a better standard of teaching, learning and assessment than that seen in the secondary phase. Capacity for bringing about improvement has increased as primary staff have gained experience. Secondary leaders are not doing enough to take advantage of the better practice in the primary sector to help them improve weak areas.

The leadership of the sixth form has developed well and is now making more impact than previously on the quality of the provision for older students. Improving curriculum planning and support for less successful subject areas are helping to improve the quality of teaching in this phase, as well as fostering students' confidence.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teaching, learning and assessment in the secondary phase are not improving as quickly as other areas in the school. There is not enough focus on basic principles of good teaching and learning. When talking about improvements to teaching, leaders rightly refer to pupils' behaviour and attendance. However, they do not focus enough on the impact that engaging and well-planned teaching would have on pupils' long-term commitment to school and their studies. Where teaching is already strong, it becomes stronger, but weak practice is not catching up as quickly as it needs to. In the secondary phase, pupils are not challenged enough and standards are still too low in some subjects. Pupils' comments to inspectors were revealing. One pupil commented that 'some lessons feel long because work is too hard or is

too easy'. Another pupil talked about work being 'boring and repetitive' and that teachers 'might give you extension work or you have to wait'. Pupils clearly really appreciate it when teachers obviously care as much about their learning as they do about their welfare. Many pupils are still not confident learners. As at the last monitoring inspection, some pupils lack self-belief when contributing their views and ideas in lessons. These pupils are self-conscious about their work and can be negative because they do not feel enough pride in themselves and their ability.

Teaching is generally successful in the primary sector. Provision in the early years is strong, as was seen at the last full inspection. It is encouraging to see how the primary leaders and staff keep building up their skills and challenging pupils to do better, particularly with the acquisition of vocabulary and the understanding of sentence structure.

Teaching, learning and assessment in the sixth form are also stronger than the rest of the secondary phase. After a difficult year with staff absence and some loss of confidence from students, teaching is now back on track. Teachers take time to identify gaps in students' prior knowledge, broaden their horizons and support them with their independent study.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are now more settled and have more faith in the school's approaches to managing their behaviour than was the case previously. Rates of exclusion and numbers of repeat offenders are much lower than at this time last year. Serious incidents of poor behaviour are declining. Pupils are less likely to be removed from their regular lessons and placed in internal exclusion.

Low-level incidents of disruption in and out of lessons are also becoming less frequent. As at the previous two monitoring inspections, leadership of this area is strong and making a tangible impact. The assistant principal in charge of managing behaviour has built a strong team around her of middle leaders and pastoral staff. These leaders all contribute to following up incidents with pupils consistently, firmly and fairly. As a result, pupils and staff know exactly where they stand and feel secure in the school. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour had improved, although they also noted that there are areas when expectations are not high enough and pupils take advantage of this. Good behaviour is not yet habitual around the school, mainly because of the variation in the quality of teaching. There are occasions when pupils do as they are told and complete uninspiring work that is at too low a level to enable them to progress. They do this because it is expected but it will not ensure their devotion to positive attitudes in the long run.

Pupils get along well together and enjoy being part of a multicultural school with their friends from different backgrounds, religions and heritages. Pupils do not believe that bullying happens. They know that most staff care deeply for their welfare and support them as far as can reasonably be expected with any risks in the

community. In general, pupils are trusted to behave responsibly. The atmosphere around the site is generally happy and purposeful. Some gentle reminders about boisterous conduct are sometimes necessary but at a good-humoured level. During the monitoring inspection, most pupils responded very respectfully to the solemnity of the Ash Wednesday services.

Attendance, while still below national figures for primary and secondary schools, has improved and is on an upward trend across the whole school, including the sixth form. Rates of persistent absence are declining. Punctuality, too, across the school has improved. Pupils are much more conscious about the need to get to lessons on time, particularly if teachers are adamant that every second counts and that pupils' presence is of the highest importance to them. Inspectors agreed with pupils that, during lesson times, the school was quiet and that pupils were where they were supposed to be, with very few wandering the site without legitimate business.

Outcomes for pupils

Examination results for Year 11 and sixth-form students in 2018 were very disappointing and did not reflect pupils' true potential. Leaders are rightly determined that current pupils should not suffer the same disappointing outcomes. Leaders have identified groups of pupils who need extra help and support and have put in additional catch-up programmes for them. A well-designed focus on improving literacy is beginning to have an impact throughout the school. As a result, younger pupils can progress more quickly to confident reading, writing and spelling across the whole curriculum.

Leaders are closely analysing pupils' assessments and their work in books to ensure that any gaps in their knowledge are tackled. This is also true of some sixth-form students who may have missed out on important learning during their time in key stage 4. The school's systems of assessment and target-setting are at an early stage and some pupils are still not certain about what they should be aiming for or how to get there. Leaders are tentative about setting targets that will be out of reach and therefore disheartening for pupils. However, some targets are too low and do not reflect pupils' true ability.

Outcomes for the sixth form are looking more positive. Leaders of the sixth form are confident that last year's disappointing outcomes stemmed from too many cancelled lessons because of staff absence. This year, leaders have sensibly streamlined the subjects on offer, with a focus on reliable and consistent quality of teaching.

Dedication and hard work have gone into ensuring that the older pupils in the primary phase are ready for the demands of Year 6 and secondary school. The head of the primary sector and her team know that some of these pupils will need additional support to meet the expectations for their age group. Younger pupils in key stage 1 and in the early years achieve well and in line with or above national figures. A strong focus on the basics of reading, mathematics and writing, within an

engaging and well-planned curriculum, has given pupils a good start.

External support

As at the last monitoring inspection, secondary leaders are benefiting from the experienced support of the school improvement adviser from the diocese. He has provided useful practical guidance to leaders and coached them to manage some crucial aspects of school improvement on their own. The acting deputy headteacher has sought out external professional development and been inspired by some role models leading schools in similar circumstances. The leader for the primary sector has continued to draw upon the support and guidance of a school improvement partner and advisory support in English and mathematics. Sensible actions to improve the school have been taken, based on findings from monitoring inspections.

It is now essential that:

- all remaining tensions and uncertainties within the senior leadership team are resolved
- the acting headteacher takes a direct lead in overseeing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, making a significant and measurable impact on the pace of improvement
- directors hold the acting headteacher firmly to account for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and managing his senior team effectively
- directors communicate their strategic planning for the school openly and clearly.