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Mrs Zahida Hammond
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hammond

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

Following my visit with Joanne Owens, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 13 and 14 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 fifth 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 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 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
 - strengthening the curriculum for teaching fundamental 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 13 March 2019 to 14 March 2019

Evidence

Inspectors met with the headteacher and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust (MAT). They also met with the two vice-principals, two associate vice-principals, a range of middle leaders, representatives from the interim academy board (IAB), including the chair of the IAB, and a group of staff. They met formally with three groups of pupils and informally with other pupils in class and around the school. They observed teaching and learning in a wide range of classrooms and pupils' behaviour and attitudes as they arrived at school and at break and lunchtimes.

Inspectors examined a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation document and the school's improvement plan. They also scrutinised records of meetings involving the IAB, pupils' attendance, behaviour, safeguarding and pupils' assessment information. Inspectors evaluated leaders' monitoring documentation and completed an extensive scrutiny of pupils' work, focusing particularly on disadvantaged pupils.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the Nicolas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust (NPCAT), which the school is part of, has appointed a lead for behaviour and attendance to add capacity to the leadership structure of the school. There has also been a behaviour support assistant appointed by the trust to work with the school. The IAB remains in place and there have been three meetings since the previous monitoring inspection. One member of part-time staff retired at the end of the previous term.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Despite a turbulent and challenging journey, the headteacher and two vice-principals have remained consistently enthusiastic, loyal and unwaveringly determined to ensure that St Peter's Catholic Voluntary Academy provides the best possible Catholic educational experience for the community it serves. Senior leaders' efforts have been further complemented by the appointment of the trust's CEO, who is highly ambitious for the school.

Since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders' rapid review of processes and practice and the additional capacity to focus on improving attendance and behaviour and reduce fixed-term exclusions is bearing fruit. As a result, pupils' absence is incrementally improving, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Likewise, incidents of poor behaviour are reducing and, therefore, the number of fixed-term exclusions have reduced. However, leaders are under no illusion that

such improvements need to be sustained on a long-term basis so that these pupils' outcomes improve too.

The school self-evaluation document is fluid and continues to be regularly reviewed and updated based on emerging needs identified through leaders' monitoring activities. It is accurate and summarises the current position of the school. This demonstrates leaders' precise understanding of the school's strengths and areas that continue to need urgent attention, such as attendance, behaviour and disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. The school improvement plan remains a valuable strategic document for leaders. The priorities set at the time of the previous monitoring inspection have provided leaders with a series of actions which they have addressed with increased support and vigour. As a result, the capacity to improve the school further is evident.

Senior leaders' monitoring systems to check on the quality of teaching and learning are thorough. A focused approach to coach staff and to improve their practice, so that consistency improves, is in place and increased consistency is evident in some aspects of the school's work. Professional development opportunities afforded to staff are timely and focus on those aspects of their teaching practice that will make the most difference, for example questioning and behaviour management. Staff value the opportunities they are given to engage in professional development and they enjoy sharing good practice with colleagues in the school and across the trust.

The current pupil premium strategy plan has been closely reviewed since the previous monitoring inspection. As a result, there is a much more strategic approach being adopted by leaders to identify underachieving pupils early, particularly around subject-specific gaps in knowledge. Therefore, planned interventions in place are bespoke and having a positive effect on disadvantaged pupils' progress and learning, particularly so for current Year 10 and 11 pupils.

Senior leaders continually and frequently hold middle leaders to account for their work. Consequently, middle leaders, including heads of subject and directors of progress, have a better grasp of the progress of groups of pupils in their subject areas. They use pupil assessment information to identify underachievement sooner and ensure that necessary interventions are in place so that gaps in knowledge diminish more swiftly than in previous years. The work of middle leaders now links together and is complementing the work of senior leaders to improve standards. Despite these improvements, some middle leaders with subject responsibilities, are not as skilled as others when it comes to improving the quality and consistency of teaching in their subject areas.

The school's governance structure, or IAB as it is commonly known, is providing higher levels of challenge to the headteacher and other leaders. As a group, they use their wide-ranging skills and expertise wisely. As a result, expectations have heightened rapidly regarding what leaders should present to them so that the IAB are wholly informed of the position of the school. Consequently, the IAB have an

accurate understanding of the school's strengths and those areas that require further attention. This holistic knowledge ensures that they can provide and deploy appropriate support so that there is a demonstrable impact in leaders' actions, such as on pupils' attendance and behaviour support packages provided.

Safeguarding children is a priority for all staff. The designated safeguarding lead is thorough, and her tenacity is evident. She considers each referral carefully and, therefore, ensures that decisions are focused on the needs of the child. Alongside this, the IAB take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously by ensuring that policies are up to date and meet legal requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Despite the inconsistencies evident, the quality of teaching and, therefore, learning across the school continue to improve. Senior leaders are spending a lot more time strategically monitoring teaching and observing learning across subject areas. As a result, they continue to give, although more frequently now, specific feedback to teachers, with areas they need to focus on to improve their practice. Where this has the most effect, staff reflect on their targets for improvement and practice, seek appropriate support and advice and then demonstrate through further monitoring how they have improved.

Teachers are becoming confident when planning to sequence learning so that pupils make gains in their knowledge, understanding and skills. This continues to contribute to pupils' increased levels of engagement. For example, this was particularly evident in Year 10 Spanish and in Year 10 and Year 11 mathematics, as planning increasingly meets the needs of the pupils in these classes.

Questioning continues to prompt and probe pupils' understanding and ideas. Professional development opportunities for staff continue to develop their skills in using questioning. For example, teachers tap into pupils' prior learning and gauge their understanding of a topic or idea. However, some teachers are still not using questioning well enough to tackle pupils' misconceptions or probe for further extension or development of ideas. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and misconceptions remain.

Pupils' oral literacy is being developed well. Most teachers insist on pupils responding in full sentences and using subject-specific vocabulary when responding to questions. However, this is inconsistent and needs to be reflected in pupils' written work, particularly the spelling of subject-specific vocabulary. Alongside pupils' speaking and communication skills developing, teachers are more regularly planning for pupils to collaborate and discuss their learning, for example in Year 11 English and science. Despite pupils' oral literacy developing over time, teachers need to consider carefully how they check on the accuracy of pupils' discussions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The large majority of pupils engage in and show positive attitudes to their learning. Where this is the case, pupils are making consistent gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding over time. However, a significant minority of pupils continue to disrupt their own and, in some instances, others' learning. Despite this, pupils are confident that teachers are quick to deal with disruptive behaviour.

The Catholic and community ethos of the school continues to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. For example, pupils continue to willingly and enthusiastically participate in family dining and demonstrate encouraging attitudes to school. The curriculum also contributes to this. For example, it was a pleasure to observe Year 7 pupils in a food technology lesson making chilli con carne respectfully, cooperatively and safely – they were true ambassadors to the school and its values.

Pupils, in the main, show respect to each other, staff and visitors. They are more than happy to share their views and ideas. Pupils speak confidently about how the personal, social, health and economic programme encourages and promotes attributes such as tolerance and diversity. Pupils are resolute in their view that if someone is different they are treated with dignity and respect. Pupils are prepared well spiritually and morally to be citizens in modern British society.

Attendance remains a significant concern for leaders. However, since the previous monitoring inspection, leaders have worked with rapidity to initiate a more strategic approach to dealing with pupils' absence. As a result, attendance overall and for individual pupils is showing incremental signs of improvement. Despite leaders' concerns around the rates of absence for Year 8 and 10 pupils, overall and for groups of pupils, attendance is showing signs of recovery and improvement. Persistent absence is reducing and the proportion of pupils who have 100% attendance has improved since the previous monitoring inspection because of collaborative efforts.

A concerted and collaborative approach is ensuring that pupils, particularly the most vulnerable, are attending school with more regularity than previously. Nonetheless, leaders are well aware of how important it is to continue these strategic actions so that improvements continue and are sustained on a long-term basis. Parents must continue to play their part in ensuring that their children attend school as regularly as possible so that they do not miss any important learning time.

The newly formed behaviour team are making headway in supporting both staff and pupils so that there is a consistency in expectations and standards. As a result of leaders evaluating and refining existing systems and processes, the proportion of pupils involved in incidents of poor behaviour has reduced. Therefore, fixed-term exclusions have reduced since the previous monitoring inspection and in comparison to this point last academic year.

A proactive, rather than reactive, approach is providing the necessary resources and routines so that incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Support for individual teachers and the identification of specific classes is providing a more systematic approach so that standards and expectations heighten for all. The behaviour team are firmly committed to supporting the most vulnerable pupils so that incidents of poor behaviour and fixed-term exclusions continue to reduce. The use of internal exclusion is proving beneficial so that pupils do not miss crucial time at school. However, to ensure curriculum continuity, leaders agree that the work pupils complete in the internal base needs to be linked with their current class work, rather than the generic work they are given at present.

Outcomes for pupils

As noted at the time of the previous monitoring inspection, Year 11 outcomes in 2018 demonstrate that pupils made inadequate progress from their broadly average starting points. This was very much the case for disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. This is undoubtedly linked to the fact that these pupils had not been afforded anything better than weak teaching throughout their time during key stage 3. This was further compounded because of staffing instability, whereas current pupils are benefiting from ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching. Therefore, and despite inconsistencies in teaching, current pupils are acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding at a much better rate.

Leaders have spent a considerable amount of time and effort and they have sought appropriate professional development for staff, so that assessment information has a high degree of accuracy. As a result, pupils' needs are being increasingly met so that any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are identified and addressed quickly. Current assessment information, provided by leaders, demonstrates that current pupils' outcomes are variable across the school. However, there are noteworthy improvements in mathematics, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

While current disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are variable, and work in pupils' books would support this, these pupils are showing signs of more secure learning and progress over time, particularly so for Year 11 pupils. Nevertheless, leaders explicitly understand the importance of continuing this momentum of improvement so that disadvantaged pupils achieve what they are capable of by the time they leave school, and outcomes do not replicate those of previous years.

Although showing steady signs of improvement, fundamentally driven by strong leadership in this area, the progress for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is inconsistent and lags behind that of other pupils in the school. Information that staff receive is detailed and informative. However, teachers' use of this important pupil information when planning learning remains variable.

Leaders are currently reviewing targets for Year 9 pupils. This reflects the aspirational culture they are creating. Pupils in Years 7 and 8, albeit variable, are

making better gains in the subjects they are studying as teaching improves and expectations increase in consistency. However, leaders acknowledge that there is still a journey to be had to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is of a consistently strong standard.

External support

The CEO of the MAT continues to honour his commitment to the school by providing appropriate financial support, so that support to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance is available to leaders. The trust has commissioned an external contract with an attendance company to support leaders in developing stronger community and family links so that attendance improves at a more rapid pace.

An external review of the school took place in February 2019, which was particularly helpful in supporting leaders to identify areas of strength in the school and suggestions regarding how leaders can tackle areas for improvement identified at the previous monitoring inspection by Ofsted. There is another pupil premium review planned for April 2019.