

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 June 2019

Mr Fraser Long
Executive Principal
Dominic Barbieri Multi-Academy Company
St Gregory the Great Catholic School
Cricket Road
Cowley
Oxford
OX4 3DR

Dear Mr Long

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Susan Aykin, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Peter Dunmall and Stuart Edwards, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 11 and 12 June 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 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 am able to recommend that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers in the secondary and primary phases.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the school improvement board, 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 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 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 fifth monitoring inspection on 11 June 2019 to 12 June 2019

Evidence

Inspectors met with senior leaders, middle leaders and staff. They observed teaching and learning in the primary and secondary phases of the school. Meetings were held with members of the school improvement board (SIB), the executive principal and two school improvement advisers, including the adviser from the Diocese of Birmingham. Inspectors reviewed pupils' work in lessons and selected a sample of work for scrutiny. There were no sixth-form lessons over the two days of the inspection because of examinations. However, inspectors met with the senior leader responsible for the sixth form and met a group of sixth-form students. Inspectors also met with representative groups of pupils from the secondary and primary phase. A range of documentation was scrutinised, including information about progress, attendance, behaviour, development of teaching and learning and the plans to improve the school. Arrangements for safeguarding were reviewed, including checks made on staff working in the school.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in March 2019, the Dominic Barbieri Multi-Academy Company (DBMAC) appointed the acting headteacher as permanent head of the secondary school. The acting deputy headteacher's role has also been made a permanent appointment. The key stages 1 and 2 phase leaders have been appointed as assistant headteachers in the primary phase. The executive principal of the DBMAC continues to provide overall leadership for the primary and the secondary provision. There has been no change to the plans for the school to become part of the Pope Francis Multi-Academy Company, but no date has been firmly set for this move. Directors of the company intend to appoint a substantive overall executive principal to oversee the all-through provision.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the appointment of the substantive roles of secondary headteacher and deputy headteacher, senior leaders across all phases are now presenting a united front. They are resilient and are determined to work together productively to improve the school. Their roles and responsibilities are clearer than they were at previous monitoring inspections.

The primary headteacher knows her school well and is clear about her priorities. She leads with energy, autonomy and rigour. Her plans for improvement are ambitious and strategic. She makes effective use of the primary school improvement partner, ensuring that the work of leaders and staff in the primary school makes a difference. Similar insightful and forward-looking leadership is seen in the early years, which is a strength of the school. The appointments of phase leaders as assistant headteachers in the primary school have raised their status and self-worth and their contribution to school improvement is making a strong impact.

In the secondary phase, leadership is now more secure and stable since the previous acting roles have been made permanent. Leaders told inspectors that they now feel more confident and certain about where the secondary provision is headed.

However, members of the SIB and directors of the DBMAC have not ensured that the secondary headteacher and deputy headteacher have sufficient support with their substantive responsibilities. Leadership of the secondary phase is inexperienced. The secondary headteacher has acted on findings from previous monitoring inspections and drawn up appropriate plans to improve the school. However, he is not yet making enough direct impact on raising achievement and ensuring good teaching. Until recently, the headteacher of the secondary phase did not have enough guidance on how to lead a senior team effectively when a school is in challenging circumstances. His line management of the senior team is underdeveloped, and it is too early to identify whether it is having the necessary impact on standards, particularly in the quality of teaching. The deputy headteacher understands the school, its context and pupils very well. She has plenty of ideas of how to improve the school but has not had enough clear direction and support about how to prioritise improvements. In short, the weaknesses in the secondary school leadership must now urgently be addressed by the DBMAC in order to continue and sustain improvements.

The assistant principals in the secondary phase have grown from strength to strength in their areas of work. Confident, determined leadership characterises the work of the leader responsible for managing pupils' behaviour and improving attendance. Through her minute attention to detail and firm compassion, she has inspired a strong team of year leaders and pastoral staff. As a result, approaches to managing pupils' behaviour and their welfare have been transformed since the section 5 inspection when the school was judged to require special measures.

Similarly, the assistant principal with responsibility for improving teaching has made a positive impact on pupils' learning. His own expertise in how pupils learn has grown and he has taken full responsibility for energetically overseeing the quality of teaching throughout the secondary phase. Staff appreciate the extra support and training they receive, and higher standards in teaching are being more consistently reached.

Staff at middle leadership level continue to contribute confidently to the school's improvement. Sixth-form leadership too has strengthened since the last inspection. The leader knows the needs and abilities of students and ensures that their achievement and welfare are monitored closely.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective and improvements have been sustained. Checks on adults working in the school meet requirements and are overseen regularly by the member of the school improvement board. The team of designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs) continue to work together effectively and have strengthened their knowledge and understanding of the different risks to pupils. The DSLs' work is highly regarded by the local authority. Their records of

safeguarding concerns are held up as exemplars of effective practice. The DSLs are pleased to be setting up a community initiative designed to help agencies predict the changing risks outside of school. This dynamic project is typical of these leaders' attitudes, which are outward-looking and realistic about safeguarding risks in the local area.

Members of the SIB have continued to increase their knowledge and understanding of the school's performance. Since the last monitoring inspection, they have refocused their committee meetings on the key priorities for the school. Some of this improved focus is at an early stage, including plans for how the secondary leadership will be supported and held to account.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

As at the last monitoring inspection, the quality of teaching is variable. Stronger teaching is seen in the primary phase, where teachers' expectations are rising overall as the confidence of leaders grows. Teachers and teaching assistants ask pupils challenging questions, listen carefully to their responses to check understanding and correct errors or misconceptions promptly. A precise focus on what pupils are learning is helping to keep up the momentum for the younger pupils.

It is encouraging to hear leaders and teachers talking more assuredly about pupils' learning, rather than pupils' behaviour, which was the case at the last monitoring visit. More teachers are using the helpful strategies that they learn about in their regular professional development sessions. Inspectors observed some improved teaching in the secondary phase, notably in English, history, technology, art and religious education. The teaching of mathematics has also improved. In these subjects, teachers encourage pupils to 'show their thinking' out loud and give more extended and confident answers, in preparation for writing.

Pupils' views of teaching match what was seen by inspectors. Pupils told inspectors again about the inconsistent quality of lessons with some agency teachers. However, many pupils, particularly in younger age groups in the secondary phase, talked about how some teachers make sure that all pupils 'get involved' in the lesson. They talked about enjoying being challenged 'almost beyond limits' and how these teachers 'don't let you waste your time'.

Lack of attention to detail is hampering some of the improvements to teaching and learning. Senior leaders in the secondary phase have not done enough to ensure that pupils benefit from working in a consistently tidy and encouraging environment. Many teachers take a real pride in keeping their classroom spaces organised and conducive to learning. However, some classrooms are not looked after well at all. Dirty whiteboards make presentations hard to read for some pupils. Some staff make errors with spelling and punctuation. This does not set a good example for pupils or make them feel valued as learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Consistent management of pupils' behaviour in the secondary phase has been sustained since the last monitoring inspection. Fewer lessons overall are disrupted by poor behaviour, although pupils told inspectors that there is still room for improvement. It is encouraging to see that pupils are setting themselves higher standards for conduct. Many talk about the contribution they make themselves to behaviour throughout the school. Pupils told an inspector that they would advise others to ignore what other people say about the school and that 'if you want to do well, you will.' These pupils agree that, from what they know from older brothers and sisters, behaviour in the school has improved.

A few pupils expressed concerns about bullying and unkind words that they experience in the school. They admitted that they do not always report their worries to staff. When these comments were reported by inspectors, school leaders immediately took action to ensure that pupils had an opportunity to voice their worries to a trusted adult. In this case, leaders' prompt and dedicated determination to put pupils first shone through.

Pupils are lively and sometimes boisterous in between lessons. A high staff presence helps to cajole and escort pupils from lesson to lesson to avoid lateness. However, pupils comply willingly and are gradually acquiring more punctual habits.

As behaviour has improved, overall exclusion rates have declined. However, leaders agree that the proportions of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils who are excluded are still too high.

Leaders in the primary and secondary phases, including the sixth form, work relentlessly with families to reduce casual absence. As a result, attendance continues to improve. It is also encouraging that attendance figures for public examinations are much higher than in the previous year, with very few pupils not arriving to take subjects or papers.

Outcomes for pupils

In the primary phase, children in the early years are clearly on track to reach national expectations for a good level of development. Early reading is taught well in key stage 1, with most pupils developing fluency in decoding unfamiliar words and sight-reading high-frequency vocabulary. They have plenty of opportunities to practise reading through access to well-matched books for the level they are working at. Teachers and teaching assistants model accurate letters and sounds through reading to pupils. Pupils then go on to read and practise their phonics knowledge.

Further up in the primary phase, pupils of all abilities make sustained progress in writing. The most able pupils confidently write in accurate sentences, with adventurous vocabulary and correct punctuation.

In the secondary phase, the recently introduced approach to improving pupils' spoken English and exploration of ideas, is strongest in history, religious education and English. In these subjects, many pupils use their knowledge to rehearse ideas out loud and practise reasoned argument and extended answers. However, in some areas, pupils' limited vocabulary and weak literacy continue to be barriers to their learning. Teachers do not all do enough to make sure that pupils understand the content of the subject being taught, through effective teaching of necessary vocabulary. Sometimes pupils are directed to use 'keywords' that are subject-specific, when actually more basic vocabulary is needed to help them frame their answers to questions.

Improving pupils' literacy was identified as a top priority at the time of the last monitoring inspection. Leaders have introduced more strategies to help improve pupils' vocabulary and language skills in the secondary phase. For example, leaders have rightly focused on promoting reading, and pupils' use of the school library has increased significantly. However, not enough has been done to draw up a coherent plan, based exactly on what pupils' needs are, particularly for those pupils whose reading is at too low a level for them to access the content of lessons independently.

External support

Leaders in the secondary phase of the school are still reliant on external guidance to support improvement planning, including the findings from monitoring inspections. Over time, the helpful visits and insights from the school improvement adviser from the diocese have supported senior leaders. The recent appointment of an experienced secondary headteacher from the local area is promising, and already he has identified exactly what the strengths and weaknesses are in the current senior secondary team.

The head of the primary phase uses the objective oversight of her school improvement partner to good effect, ensuring an effective cycle of 'plan, do and review' to challenge herself and her team.

However, the pace of improvement in the school is at risk of faltering because directors and members of the SIB have not ensured that senior leaders in the secondary phase have sufficient support and challenge to raise standards in the school. Nor are leaders taking enough opportunity to look outwards, visit other schools and see what good provision really looks like for secondary pupils.

- Directors, members of the SIB and the executive principal must ensure that:
 - all leaders in the secondary phase are held to account through rigorous quality assurance and line management
 - the headteacher and deputy headteacher of the secondary phase have sufficient support and challenge to enable them to lead the provision effectively and increase the impact they make on overall standards.
- Leaders must ensure that pupils in the secondary phase improve their literacy, learn to read fluently and acquire a better vocabulary.