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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mr Fraser Long
Executive Principal
St Gregory the Great Catholic School
Cricket Road
Cowley
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX4 3DR

Dear Mr Long

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Gregory the Great Catholic School

Following my visit with Susan Bullen, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10–11 March 2020, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 2019.

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.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence, I advise that the school should appoint no more than three newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, 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

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in October 2019

- Directors, governors and leaders across different phases have not worked well together. Strong governance and clear senior leadership are needed to unite staff and develop a positive all-through school culture. Responsible personnel should ensure that better planning enables more effective targeting of resources on actions that will make the greatest impact. This is needed to ensure that staff morale improves and staff absence reduces.
- The school's key stage 3 curriculum is too narrow. Pupils do not receive their entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum. Leaders should ensure that subjects such as computing and music are taught regularly. Some subjects in the secondary phase are poorly planned. Some teachers lack the subject-specific expertise necessary. Leaders should improve the quality of teaching in the secondary phase so that pupils catch up quickly.
- Leaders must continue to place greater emphasis on improving secondary-aged pupils' reading skills. Leaders and teachers should make sure that pupils, including those with SEND, receive the support that they require to catch up.
- Pupils' behaviour in the secondary years is not good enough. Leaders should ensure that staff are supported to manage pupils' behaviour and reduce the number of negative incidents.
- Leaders provide effective careers guidance for sixth formers but are less proactive in promoting other aspects of their personal development. The 16 to 19 study programmes need a more diverse range of enrichment and extension activities to maximise the progress students make.
- Some pupils report that bullying incidents are too high in key stages 3 and 4. Leaders should ensure that the number of incidents reduces.
- It is recommended that the school does not appoint any newly qualified teachers.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 10 March 2020 to 11 March 2020

Evidence

Inspectors met with the executive principal, head of primary, acting head of secondary and a range of staff and leaders from across the school. We reviewed safeguarding arrangements, including the central record of recruitment checks and other relevant processes and documents. We visited 11 lessons along with a senior leader and talked to groups of pupils and staff. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the interim governing body, the chair of the board of trustees and a representative of the diocese.

Context

The acting head of secondary took up her post in January 2020, when the previous head of secondary left the school. A number of staff members have left the secondary phase of the school, resulting in some temporary vacancies that are currently being covered by long-term supply staff. The governing body was replaced by an interim governing body (IGB) in January 2020.

The progress made by the school in tackling the key areas for improvement identified at the section 5 inspection

Secondary phase leaders' prompt actions are beginning to address deficiencies in the breadth of the key stage 3 curriculum. Year 7 pupils now receive music lessons, supported by the Oxfordshire music service. Leaders' work to ensure that all key stage 3 pupils learn some relevant computing knowledge this academic year is under way. However, leaders know that pupils wishing to take these subjects in key stage 4 will not have been suitably prepared. Leaders intend providing additional support for these pupils in the months ahead. Plans for the key stage 3 curriculum from September 2020 incorporate appropriate time provision for pupils to study music and computing. Currently, leaders are looking creatively at how they can ensure that they have suitably trained teachers in place to deliver these subjects.

Leaders are taking clear steps to promote literacy within the secondary phase of the school, where weaknesses were previously identified. The range of strategies adopted is leading to pupils' increased engagement with books and reading. Initiatives to support those who most need to improve their learning skills are taking place and are due to be evaluated soon. Teachers are beginning to develop their clear and shared responsibility to provide support for pupils they teach who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers now know who these pupils are and what their needs are. There is further work to do to develop teachers' skills in addressing these pupils' learning needs consistently well.

Some useful work is under way to extend the post-16 curriculum so that it better supports students' personal development. Students following some courses, such as business studies, now complete work experience as an integral part of their studies. Others are engaging in a student leadership programme that enables them to contribute meaningfully to the life of the school. For example, some students are now offering literacy or numeracy support for pupils in the primary phase or Year 7, help out in key stage 3 lessons or act as buddies for pupils joining the school. Students spoke positively with us about the support they can access with regard to their physical and mental health, such as via the school nurse. Currently, it remains unclear how leaders check that all students engage sufficiently well with learning and development opportunities beyond the subjects they are studying.

Pupils and staff reported higher standards of behaviour in the secondary phase than at the time of the last inspection. They reflect positively on work that has been done to relaunch behaviour strategies, so that secondary-aged pupils are able to better understand and abide by what is expected of them. Staff have received useful extra training to support them in this work. Pupils are reassured by staff's increased visibility around the secondary part of the school site. When necessary, staff intervene effectively to manage instances of boisterous behaviour as pupils move around the site, such as between lessons or at lunchtime. In lessons, pupils are increasingly calm and respectful. Standards of behaviour in the primary phase of the school remain high.

Leaders are taking useful steps to address concerns about bullying. Pupils in the primary phase continue to understand what bullying is and say it rarely happens. Primary-phase leaders' records of bullying incidents support this view. In the secondary phase, systems for reporting bullying concerns are being promoted, including by pupils during a recent Year 7 assembly, for example. While this initially led to an increase in reported incidents, records indicate that these are being dealt with more quickly than in the past. Secondary-phase pupils told inspectors that bullying incidents are reducing, as standards of behaviour improve.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Trust leaders have made a conscious decision to run the two phases of the school as separate entities. Consequently, there is little work currently being done to develop the culture of an all-through school. Nevertheless, staff in the primary and secondary phases are supportive of each other, sharing expertise and ideas to help the pupils who they jointly serve.

Members of the trust, diocese and IGB now have a shared understanding of the leadership structures and actions that are needed to rapidly improve the secondary phase of the school. Their initial work to strengthen leadership in the secondary phase is showing some early signs of impact. School leaders' roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined and understood. Secondary phase staff report having a greater sense of direction about their work as a result, which, in

turn, is lifting their morale. However, there is much still needing to be done to ensure that pupils in the secondary phase have a consistently positive school experience, as is currently the case in the primary phase.

The IGB was put in place in January 2020. This group brings much-needed expertise and experience to strengthen how leaders across both phases of the school are challenged about the impact of their work. The chair of the interim governing body demonstrates an astute understanding of the school's current strengths and weaknesses. Plans for the IGB to hold school leaders routinely to account for the effectiveness of their work appear well considered. At this stage, it is too soon to see the impact of the IGB's work on standards in the school.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose. Actions are rightly focused on the most urgent improvement points identified at the last inspection. Timescales appear suitably rapid. For some actions, the plan is not clear about what the desired improvement will look like. This risks impeding how leaders are held to account for the impact of their work. There are currently separate improvement plans for the primary and secondary phases of the school, reflecting the decision that they should operate separately. Regardless of the reason behind this conscious decision, this makes it harder for trust leaders and governors to retain a clear strategic oversight of the school as a whole.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Staff remain committed to the local community and the pupils they serve. They understand the importance of securing pupils' and parents' confidence as they work to improve the school. There are some early indicators of their success in this area. For instance, the successful Christmas fayre brought large numbers of pupils, staff and residents together in a positive way.
- Leaders are investing sensibly in actions to support staff well-being and training. Although in its absolute infancy, this work reflects leaders' understanding of the need to monitor staff welfare more strategically, intervening more promptly when necessary. Leaders have useful plans to develop some secondary-phase teachers' knowledge beyond their own subject, in order to support delivery of the planned curriculum in the next academic year.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The trust has limited capacity to provide the level of support currently needed, particularly in the secondary phase of the school. The executive principal role does not provide sufficient oversight to drive improvements forward rapidly enough. As such, the trust is heavily reliant on external support. Lines of accountability at trust level are clouded, because the executive principal is also a director of the trust, and one of the external consultants, who is a volunteer, is now the chair of the IGB.

- Despite recent changes for the better, the initial pace of improvement since the school was judged to require special measures in March 2017 was too slow. This has had a negative impact on the confidence that the local community has in the school. Along with a reduced number of pupils applying to join the school, this provides leaders with additional challenges in being able to recruit sufficient numbers of high-quality staff in the secondary phase.

External support

The external consultants referenced in the previous inspection report continue to provide useful support, mainly to the secondary phase of the school. One volunteer consultant is currently the chair of the interim executive board. While providing helpful direction and support to school leadership, he and the trust recognise that this dual role presents a potential conflict of interest with regard to accountability. This arrangement is currently under review. Two other consultants continue to work with leaders in the secondary phase of the school. This is contributing successfully to improvements in teaching and the curriculum, although there is further work to do. Additionally, a school improvement partner from the diocese provides ongoing support and challenge to leaders in the secondary phase.