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John Rooney
The McAuley Catholic High School
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Dear Mr Rooney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The McAuley Catholic High School

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- refine the school improvement plan and monitoring procedures to ensure that leaders and governors have a stronger understanding about the effect of the curriculum on pupils' learning.

Context

The number of governors on the governing board has reduced over recent years from 20 to 11. The school is currently recruiting to one of these positions. At the time of the inspection, Year 11 pupils and students in Year 13 were not attending school. This was due to them having completed their education in that key stage. All pupils in Year 10 had just returned to school following a period of self-isolation. During this period, pupils were educated remotely. Twelve members of staff were isolating due to COVID-19 precautions. Since the last inspection, the toilet facilities have been modernised.

Main findings

You and other leaders are taking the actions necessary to improve the school. Parents, carers and staff agree that the school is much improved. Staff feel supported and say that you take account of their workload and well-being. The comments made by many parents in the online inspection questionnaire note the caring ethos and the efforts of staff who 'have gone above and beyond', particularly given the challenges presented by the pandemic over the last year. Your leadership team is united and has a clear sense of direction. This is supported by leaders' clear moral purpose that is threaded through the school. You have made improvements to most of the issues identified at the last inspection.

The quality of education has been strengthened since the previous inspection. In English, topics are carefully sequenced to build on what pupils already know. Ambitious curriculum plans highlight key knowledge and specialist vocabulary. They help teachers to focus on what pupils must know and remember over time. Improvements in the quality of education are, however, more evident in some subjects than others. Plans in some subjects are not as well developed as in English. For example, in science, curriculum plans do not detail precisely the specific subject knowledge that pupils should be taught and should remember over time.

Throughout the pandemic, you ensured that pupils covered the planned curriculum. Pupils in Years 11 and 13 were able to complete their courses before they left. You made sure that pupils are ready for their next phase of education. The majority of Year 11 pupils will be returning in September to join the sixth form. You are providing them with 'bridging work' over the summer to help them to prepare for their sixth-form courses.

You and other leaders place pupils firmly at the centre of your work. Pupils feel that you have their best interests at heart and that staff listen to the concerns they raise. You have introduced a system to keep a close check on pupils' attitudes to learning. Leaders review this information and make sure that appropriate help is quickly put in place where pupils are not behaving well in class. Pupils' behaviour continues to improve. They now behave respectfully in lessons and move between classes calmly. They are polite to staff and visitors. Lessons are now more purposeful.

Attendance has improved since the previous inspection. Leaders and staff monitor attendance closely. Pastoral leaders work with families and outside agencies to encourage stronger attendance. Staff quickly recognise where pupils may be struggling in lessons. They know this might be for many reasons and work rapidly to identify how best to help each pupil. Attendance has been strong since you opened to all pupils in March 2021.

Although governors are knowledgeable about the school, they do not hold leaders to account consistently well. They have made arrangements for training in the autumn term to develop their role in supporting and challenging leaders.

There are still curriculum improvements that are required to ensure that pupils know more over time. You are taking steps to address these. You check the progress of these priorities each term. However, the lines of accountability in the school's improvement plans are not precise enough. This makes it hard for others, including governors, to challenge and support you in meeting your ambitions for your school.

Additional support

You have welcomed the support made available to you from a national leader of education. This has helped you to focus on your key priorities and to take decisions to improve the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, a representative of the diocese, curriculum leaders of English and science and a group of pupils. I met the chair and two other members of the governing board to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a national leader of education remotely.

I visited lessons with the deputy headteacher. I looked at pupils' workbooks in science and English. I reviewed the minutes of the governing board meetings and looked at attendance information. I considered the 180 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 105 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Hallam, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Doncaster. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Eleanor Belfield
Her Majesty's Inspector