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Sarah Wilkinson
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Wilkinson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy

Following my visit with Steven Shaw, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and John Downs, Marc Doyle and Barry Found, Ofsted Inspectors (OI), to your school on 29 and 30 June 2021, 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 most 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 May 2019. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

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

Having considered 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 local trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

Having considered the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, and the chief executive officer of the Blessed Peter Snow Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kirklees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Carl Sugden
Ofsted Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 29 and 30 June 2021

Context

Since the inspection in May 2019, which placed the school into special measures, the leadership of the school has changed. In February 2020 the chief executive of the trust took up post. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2020. Since the monitoring inspection in February 2021, the trust has put in place a local governing body. This is called the trust improvement board.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the school. The school has dealt with a high incidence of COVID-19 cases among staff and pupils. Staff absence has limited the capacity of leaders to implement the improvement plan.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The school improvement plan identifies the right priorities for improvement. There are early signs that these measures are having some impact. Most staff recognise this improvement. However, the pace of change has been limited by the impact of COVID-19.

The trust improvement board was established only recently. Previously, oversight of the school has been weak. Members of the trust improvement board know what is required and are becoming more familiar with the school.

The first priority in the school improvement plan is to have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders have begun to build and adopt an effective curriculum. The curriculum on offer is broad and it includes all pupils. Subject leaders ensure that the right knowledge and skills are taught to pupils. However, there is more work to do to ensure that the curriculum is logically sequenced.

In English, there is consistency in the planning and delivery of the curriculum. Teachers have an effective grasp of pupils' starting points in literacy and reading. The range of texts that pupils study is increasingly wide-ranging. However, pupils are not becoming proficient in one skill before moving on to another. The improvements in English have not had a positive impact on pupils' knowledge because the curriculum is not sequenced carefully enough.

Some pupils arrive at school in Year 7 with weak reading skills. A programme is in place to identify these pupils and to support them. All pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to read for pleasure and to develop their reading skills. The very weakest readers get support to improve their reading comprehension. However, not all staff involved in the programme are well trained on how to ensure greater accuracy and fluency for the weakest readers.

Teachers use assessment to check what pupils know, and to plan and adjust their teaching. In science, there are some effective examples of the use of assessment to check pupils' knowledge. However, in some subjects, teachers are thinking too much about what pupils will be tested on at the end of their course. In mathematics, for example, pupils are frequently tested using GCSE questions. There is not enough opportunity to check smaller steps in their recall of key facts and methods.

Behaviour is improving from a very poor starting point. Older pupils said that behaviour has improved over time. However, they still expressed some concerns about unacceptable language and prejudicial behaviour. When pupils report issues they are dealt with properly. However, not all pupils have confidence that every member of staff will follow up problems fully. Leaders recognise this inconsistency and further staff training is underway.

Leaders have developed strategies to improve the attendance of pupils. An attendance officer works closely with families to support attendance. Leaders are tracking attendance more carefully. There is a sharper system for intervening to improve attendance. Because of the impact of COVID-19 it is not possible to say with certainty whether these measures are working.

The majority of staff say that they have good professional development opportunities. Staff also state that their workload is well managed. They recognise that behaviour is improving, but some staff say that the behaviour policy needs to be more consistent.

Leaders self-evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately. The improvement plan rightly focuses on improving behaviour, attendance and the quality of the curriculum. However, the improvement plan pays too much attention to improving the quality of individual lessons rather than thinking about what pupils will learn through the curriculum in the longer term.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that curriculum plans in all subjects are carefully sequenced, and that assessment is used to check smaller components of knowledge.

Additional support

The school is drawing on support from other schools to support developments in literacy and English. The local authority is also providing some support for improving attendance. Some impact from this support is evident in subjects such as English. The school would benefit from a wider range of subject-specific curriculum support.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust. Inspectors also met pupils, staff and representatives of those responsible for governance.