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Alicia Freeman
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Dear Miss Freeman

Special measures monitoring inspection of The De La Salle Academy

Following my visit to your school on 23 and 24 November 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 January 2020. 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 pandemic began. I discussed the ongoing 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 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 the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ahmed Marikar
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 23 November and 24 November 2021

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, there have been considerable changes in staffing. The previous principal left in April 2021. The head of school at the time of the last inspection is currently acting principal. A new acting head of school, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have been appointed. The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team members have been clarified. There are also new subject leaders in English, mathematics and art and design. Currently, there are some temporary teachers, due to staff absences.

There have been changes to governance. This includes a new chair of trustees and three new governors. Discussions are currently taking place between the trust, the regional school's commissioner and the Department for Education in relation to the future of the school.

During the inspection, some pupils in Year 11 were being educated remotely at home, due to issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges experienced during the pandemic have slowed down some of leaders' actions to improve the school. The number of pupils on roll in Year 7 and Year 10 has declined.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Leaders, governors and staff have experienced a period of turbulence and uncertainty about the school's future. This, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, has hampered some aspects of the school's improvement. Despite these challenges, leaders have kept a clear focus on making a positive difference to the quality of education for pupils.

Together with staff, leaders are beginning to raise their expectations of pupils' achievement. Leaders know what needs to improve. Their action plan is accurate and ambitious. However, the plan lacks clear timescales. This stops leaders and governors keeping track of what should happen and when this should take place.

Governance has been strengthened with additional trustees who have a range of skills and expertise. Governors have made some improvements to the way that they work. For example, they have set up link governors who are attached to different subjects. This is beginning to strengthen their oversight of subject curriculums. Minutes of meetings show that governors are asking leaders more probing questions on the curriculum than in the past. Governors have a realistic view of the scale of improvement required at the school.

Leaders have reviewed and improved the breadth of subjects that pupils can follow at key stage 4. For example, more pupils in key stage 4 follow a language than in the past. Plans to introduce music into the key stage 3 curriculum are still in the early stages. Even so, an

increasing number of pupils, from Year 7 to Year 11, are being taught to play a musical instrument.

The quality of subject curriculums is improving. Leaders have taken appropriate action to improve the order of subject content in many curriculum areas since the last inspection. Curriculum plans in some subjects, such as mathematics, carefully identify the key knowledge that teachers want pupils to know and the order in which it is to be taught. Pupils have the opportunity to revisit prior learning at the start of lessons. Most teachers use clear explanations to help pupils to develop their knowledge. However, the curriculums in some subjects, such as science, are not as well developed. Consequently, some pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are not able to build on what they already know. Leaders are in the process of adapting these subject plans with external support.

The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is strengthening. Leaders have improved the identification of the needs of pupils with SEND. They have also improved the quality of information available to subject leaders and teachers about these pupils. Leaders have provided training for staff on how to support pupils with SEND in the classroom. However, some teachers do not use the learning plans that are in place for these pupils well enough. Consequently, the needs of some pupils with SEND are not routinely met in classrooms.

Reading continues to be a priority for the school. Leaders have put support in place for weaker readers. Leaders have strengthened the staff's knowledge of phonics through professional development. They have also improved the range of books in the library. Pupils benefit from having regular opportunities to read during form time.

There are some tentative improvements in pupils' attendance. Leaders have developed strategies to ensure that pupils attend school more regularly. Leaders work more closely with families to encourage pupils' attendance. Leaders monitor pupils' absence more carefully. There are success stories for individual pupils. However, some pupils, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils, continue to be absent from school too often.

Leaders are taking effective steps to improve pupils' behaviour. They have introduced a new behaviour system. Staff who completed the online survey feel that leaders support them to manage behaviour well. All pupils who spoke with the inspector said that they feel safe. They reported that staff do not tolerate bullying. Pupils told the inspector that they trust staff to deal with any concerns that they have. In lessons, and around the school during breaktimes, most pupils generally behave well. However, leaders have identified a very small number of pupils in some year groups who struggle to meet the school's expectations of them.

Leaders have improved the quality of the provision for the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision. Leaders work closely with pupils and alternative providers to ensure that pupils follow a suitable curriculum and are supported effectively on their return to school. Leaders make regular visits to alternative providers, and check that pupils are following their chosen courses.

Staff morale is high. Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel that leaders consider their workload. Staff are positive about the support that they receive.

Additional support

Leaders value the support that they have received from the local authority, an external consultant and a local teaching school. This has focused on developing the quality of education, improving pupils' behaviour and strengthening leadership at all levels.

Evidence

The inspector met with the acting principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders, staff, pupils, representatives of those responsible for governance, including the chair of the board of trustees and representatives of the Archdiocese of Liverpool and the local authority. The inspector held telephone calls with representatives from two alternative providers.

The inspector made short visits to a range of lessons and looked at pupils' work. Many of these visits were made jointly with senior leaders. The inspector observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at break, at lunchtime and in classrooms. The inspector also met formally with two groups of pupils to discuss their views of the school. The inspector considered a wide range of documents, including leaders' improvement plan, minutes from meetings of the governing body, subject leaders' curriculum plans and records of pupils' attendance. The inspector also checked the school's single central record. The inspector considered the responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the responses to the staff survey.