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Jeniffer Sing
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Dear Mrs Sing

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Academy of St Nicholas

Following my visit to your school on 30 March 2022, 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 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:

The school continues to require improvement. Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action toward the school becoming a good school.

Leaders should take further action to:

- continue to build on the work already started to improve the use of assessment strategies so that teachers are better equipped to help pupils know and remember more.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable changes in leadership and staffing. The current headteacher was appointed in April 2020. Two new deputy headteachers were appointed in January 2021. In addition, new subject leaders for computing, English, history, mathematics and performing arts have taken up post.

A new chief executive officer (CEO), chair of the local governing body and new chair of the trust board have been appointed.

One or two subjects, such as geography, have a high number of non-specialist teachers. These teachers are being supported with subject training. Leaders' plans for improvement have been disrupted by the absence of some staff for periods of time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, there are some temporary teachers in place, covering for staff absences.

Main findings

Since your arrival as headteacher, you have worked with leaders and staff to improve many aspects of the school. You have redesigned the leadership structure so that all leaders have clear lines of responsibility. The school development plan identifies the correct improvement priorities. This plan is frequently reviewed by you and other senior leaders to check that actions to improve the school are bearing fruit. As a result, the school is moving in a positive direction. You know that the improvement journey towards being a good school is not complete and that further work is still required to reach your ambitious goals.

You have raised expectations of what all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), can achieve. Leaders provide staff with clear information about pupils with SEND. A trust representative for SEND provides suitable training for staff to better equip them to support the needs of these pupils. Pupils with SEND have access to the full curriculum. Pupils, including those with SEND, reported that they are learning more than they did in the past.

The quality of education is improving. You have redesigned the curriculum structure so that it is more ambitious than it was previously. Pupils in key stage 3 now follow courses in design technology and drama. They also get discrete time to study music. You have introduced new pathways in key stage 4 that encourage pupils to study a modern foreign language and humanities. This is leading to an increase in the proportion of pupils taking

the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. In addition, you have ensured that there is a more appropriate balance of academic and vocational options for pupils to study. Some subject leaders have thought carefully about the key knowledge they want pupils to learn and the order that teachers should teach topics. However, the curriculums in a small number of subjects are not as far ahead as others. You are working with subject leaders in these subjects to redesign their curriculums to better identify what pupils need to learn and when they should gain this knowledge.

Subject leaders are beginning to use assessment strategies more effectively to check what pupils know and to inform future planning. However, in some subjects, teachers do not use assessment information well enough to identify whether pupils have learned the knowledge that they need to remember. This means that some pupils do not always build on what they already know.

You have been proactive in ensuring that subject leaders can access high-quality training. For example, you provide regular training sessions in school, facilitate visits to the other schools in the trust and use the expertise of external consultants to good effect. This is helping subject leaders to develop their subject knowledge and lead their areas of responsibility with greater confidence.

You have prioritised reading. A clear structure is now in place for supporting pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read. Pupils' reading ages are identified quickly as a first step to identifying those who need support to read with accuracy and automaticity. You have ensured that all staff receive phonics training. This is helping pupils who find reading difficult to develop their confidence and fluency in reading. You provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils spoke positively about the opportunities that they have to read for pleasure during the 'curriculum for life' sessions in the morning.

Some pupils have recently arrived from other countries. Some of these pupils have experienced significant trauma in their lives. You and the staff ensure that these pupils are welcomed and supported well to build their confidence and access the curriculum.

The systems to manage pupils' behaviour have improved. Staff and pupils understand the new behaviour policy. Pupils appreciate the focus on rewarding good behaviour. They reported that behaviour is improving and incidents of poor behaviour, including bullying, are reducing. This is helping them to feel safe. Your actions are also leading to a reduction in fixed-term exclusions. However, pupils also reported that, at times, there are a small minority of pupils who are not well behaved in lessons. This disrupts their learning. You are working with leaders and staff to ensure that the small number of pupils who demonstrate challenging behaviour receive appropriate support to help them improve.

You have reviewed and refined the strategies to improve pupils' attendance. Attendance is closely monitored and pupil absences are followed up quickly. Leaders and staff work more closely with families than they did previously. You reward good attendance in

school, with celebrations and rewards for pupils. Your strategies are beginning to improve the overall rate of pupils' attendance. However, some pupils are still absent from school too often. This limits their learning and hampers their achievement.

Members of the local governing body and trustees have a clear understanding of their roles. They continue to provide challenge and support to you and other leaders in equal measure. They recognise where the school has improved, but they are also well aware of the areas that require further attention.

Additional support

You have used the support provided by the local authority, the diocese, the archdiocese, a national leader of education and external consultants to make improvements to the quality of education. The school derives considerable benefit from its partnership with the trust. This includes improved support for pupils with SEND and stronger systems to improve attendance. Expertise within the trust is used well to help subject leaders to develop their knowledge and skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the senior deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and pupils. I also met with members of the local governing body, the CEO of the Liverpool Joint Catholic and Church of England Academies Trust, the trust representative for SEND provision and trustees. This was to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders of mathematics, science and humanities. I also met with the leaders responsible for reading intervention. I visited a sample of lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. I met with a group of pupils from Year 8 and Year 10 to discuss their experience of school life. I examined a range of documentation, including the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings and behaviour and attendance records. I checked the single central record on the suitability of staff to work with pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of the Liverpool Joint Catholic and Church of England Academies multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the director of education for the Diocese 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