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Paul McCahill
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Dear Mr McCahill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Becket Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- reduce the proportion of pupils who are excluded for a fixed period. Leaders must provide pupils who are excluded for a fixed period with the support they need to improve their behaviour.

Context

In March 2019, the multi-academy trust that the school was then part of merged with two other multi-academy trusts. Together, they formed Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academies Trust. The new trust's work to improve the school has sometimes been delayed due to the impact of the pandemic.

The school's leadership has been through a period of turbulence since the previous inspection. Senior leadership appointments made by the trust have brought much-needed stability and increased leadership capacity. Two new assistant headteachers have been appointed. One of these is responsible for inclusion and is the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator (SENDCo). The other is responsible for personal development and is also the designated safeguarding leader (DSL). You joined the school as headteacher in January 2022. The deputy head of sixth form was promoted to lead the sixth form in February 2022. More recently, a new deputy and a new assistant headteacher took up their positions in April 2022.

Since January 2022, several new curriculum leaders have been appointed, including leaders of English, social sciences, performing arts, business and computing, and careers. You have prioritised recruiting and retaining teachers who are subject specialists. In September 2022, all teaching posts should be filled with specialist staff.

You have developed the pastoral team. Two new heads of year and a second family support worker have joined the team recently. The role of chaplain is now a full-time position. A school counsellor will start working at the school from July 2022. These changes have increased the pastoral team's ability to support pupils' needs.

Main findings

Many leaders have joined the school recently, including you as headteacher. You have made sure that each senior leader understands their areas of responsibility. Senior leaders work together closely to identify exactly what needs to get better. The senior leadership team has detailed plans to bring about the improvements required. Some of these plans are still in the early stages of being implemented.

Leaders started a review of the curriculum. The recent pandemic and leadership changes slowed progress. Leaders plan to increase the range of subjects that pupils can study next academic year. They intend to increase the amount of time pupils spend studying English and religious education.

Curriculum leaders are checking that the course content in their subject is ambitious and well sequenced. They are identifying precisely what they want pupils to know and in what order. They are making sure that pupils have a firm foundation on which to build new knowledge. For example, in history, pupils revisit the concept of migration at each stage to deepen their understanding. The science curriculum helps pupils build their knowledge of plants and ecosystems over time. Leaders are due to complete the reviews of the subject curriculums soon.

Leaders have consistent expectations about how teachers should deliver the curriculum. They make this clear to teachers using the 'every lesson, every day' mantra. Teachers follow agreed classroom routines closely so that pupils know what to expect. For instance, 'bell work' at the start of mathematics lessons gives pupils an opportunity to recall what they know using short quizzes and questions. Most teachers are subject specialists. They think carefully about the best ways to deliver new learning. They help pupils who are struggling by breaking new content down into smaller chunks or providing model answers. However, this does not happen consistently in all subjects.

Teachers check pupils' knowledge carefully to make sure there are no gaps. Immediate feedback from teachers during lessons helps pupils learn from their mistakes. However, some teachers do not provide pupils with this help consistently. Some pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for their learning than they have done in the past. They make effective use of teachers' guidance to improve their work. However, this is not the case for all pupils. The quality of pupils' written work is inconsistent.

Improvements in the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are still in their early stages. Regular training is helping staff understand how to identify these pupils and support them effectively. Leaders have recently provided staff with up-to-date information about the needs of these pupils. However, this information often lacks detail. It does not always provide sufficient information about these pupils' particular needs or the strategies most suitable to help them. Leaders plan to create 'The Bethel Centre' to provide focused support for pupils with SEND who need it. Currently, some of these pupils do not get the help they need to access the curriculum fully.

Behaviour is getting better for most pupils. Pupils know how they are expected to behave. Fewer lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour than in the past. Most pupils are confident that staff will sort out any issues with bullying when they know it is happening. Pupils appreciate being rewarded for their positive conduct, for example with a golden ticket. Staff feel well supported in managing pupils' behaviour. However, some staff do not use the behaviour rules consistently. A small minority of pupils struggle to regulate their conduct. These pupils are not getting the help they need to behave well. The number of temporary exclusions is increasing. Leaders are about to introduce a new behaviour policy. It is focused on supporting pupils to take responsibility for managing their own behaviour.

Pupils' attendance has returned to a level similar to that seen before the pandemic. However, the number of pupils regularly absent from school has risen. More pupils are absent due to mental health issues. Leaders have appointed a second family support worker to provide more help to pupils who do not attend as often as they should.

The newly created inclusion team provides a more consistent approach to pastoral support than previously. This team considers a wide range of information if they think a pupil needs extra support. Staff know what to do if they have a concern that a pupil is at risk of potential harm. Leaders act swiftly in response to these concerns to keep pupils safe. They work closely with external agencies to make sure that pupils get the help they need. Pupils know how to stay safe, including online. They learn about risks in nearby communities that could cause them harm. For example, pupils in Year 11 know about the impact of knife crime locally.

Pupils learn about many aspects of personal, social, health and economic education. However, opportunities for pupils to appreciate what it means to live in modern Britain are not always obvious. An evaluation by leaders of the careers provision highlights that pupils need more opportunities for meaningful encounters with employers and employees. During the next academic year, all pupils in Years 10 and 12 will take part in work experience. Pupils know about the different pathways they can follow to support their career aspirations. Work to improve the post-16 life-skills programme is progressing well. The programme helps students prepare to live independently. There are ample opportunities for pupils to get involved in enrichment activities through the school's 'electives' programme, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, learning sign language and gardening. Sixth-form students volunteer in the local community, for example in local care homes for the elderly or at the local food bank.

Those responsible for governance are well informed about the school's key development priorities. They have taken decisive action to appoint new leaders and increase leadership capacity. They provide leaders with the resources they need to implement the planned improvements. They know that leaders need to resolve issues relating to the provision for pupils with SEND and rising exclusions.

Additional support

The trust is supporting the school well on its improvement journey. Trust leaders worked closely with school leaders to minimise the impact of the pandemic on pupils' learning. Trust staff provide focused support for leaders who are new to their roles. Senior leaders benefit from guidance from colleagues working at the other secondary school in the trust. Regular monitoring by trust officers helps leaders identify curriculum strengths and areas that still need to be developed.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, including the DSL and the SENDCo. I held a meeting with the chair of the local academy committee. I met with trust officers, including the strategic executive lead and the school improvement lead for secondary schools, to discuss actions taken by the trust since the previous inspection. I discussed the curriculum with teachers of mathematics, science and history, as well as meeting with teachers of other subjects. I reviewed a sample of pupils' workbooks, including some workbooks belonging to pupils with SEND. I spoke with two groups of pupils from Years 9 and 11.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and exclusions, and documents relating to safeguarding. I considered information relating to the school's governance, including minutes of the trust's board of directors.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the strategic executive lead of Our Lady Immaculate Catholic Academies Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Northampton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Northamptonshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector