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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Andrew Rannard
Headteacher
De La Salle School
Mill Brow
Eccleston
St Helens
Merseyside
WA10 4QH

Dear Mr Rannard

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to De La Salle School

Following my visit to your school on 7 July 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that those older pupils in the earlier stages of learning to read are identified accurately and supported well by staff to catch-up quickly so that they can access the curriculum

- ensure that teachers use assessment systems effectively to identify and address pupils' missing knowledge so that staff can ensure that this is embedded securely before pupils move on to new learning.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, you have made changes to the structure of the senior leadership team. You have made an internal appointment to the post of assistant headteacher. One of your three deputy headteachers has been seconded to the local authority indefinitely. In addition, you have appointed a head of science and a head of year.

Within the wider staffing structure, 16 teaching staff and 20 support staff have joined the school. You are in the process of recruiting a parent governor to fill a vacancy in this role.

Leaders' plans for implementing their refined curriculum have been disrupted by the periods of school closures and some key staff absences due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Main findings

Following the previous inspection report, you and your leadership team have acted swiftly to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. Ambitious for all pupils, you have transformed the curriculum, particularly at key stage 3. You have acted judiciously to ensure that pupils, irrespective of their ability or background, follow a suitably broad curriculum. As a result of this work, pupils are gaining the rich knowledge that they need across a wide range of subjects.

Throughout this time, governors have supported you well. Along with you, they have been skilful in identifying what is most needed to become a good school. For example, together, you have acted appropriately to strengthen the senior leadership team, ensuring that leaders' roles are clearly understood. In galvanising the senior team, you have been able to reflect on and address the weaknesses in the previous curriculum. You recognised that some of leaders' curriculum decisions were not being made in the best educational interests of all pupils. The actions that you have taken in overhauling the curriculum have been paramount in ensuring that the curriculum is now equitable.

As well as strengthening the quality of senior leadership, you have ensured that governors have a more accurate oversight of the quality of education for pupils. For example, members of the governing body have a deeper knowledge of the curriculum than they did in the past. Through their role as link governors, they hold curriculum leaders to account more effectively.

You, your senior leaders, and your governors are passionate about giving pupils equal opportunities and curriculum choice. You have ensured that pupils in key stage 4 can

choose freely from a broad range of subjects. This is helping to raise pupils' aspirations and increase the number of pupils who follow the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects.

To ensure that staff share these same high expectations, you have given them the opportunity to review their curriculums so that they are fit for purpose. Following this, heads of department worked effectively with external advisors to refine their curriculums further. As a result, subject curriculums now meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

Staff value the extensive curriculum training that you and your leadership team have provided. In most subjects, leaders have collaborated with staff to consider the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn and how best to order this knowledge. Disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are benefitting strongly from this work. While there has been rapid improvement in this area, a minority of subjects are not as far on as others.

To reflect your high aspirations, you have ensured that all pupils access the same ambitious curriculum content, including those with SEND. For example, you have put a stop to the practice of some pupils with SEND being unable to study a modern foreign language at key stage 3. Pupils in the 'greenhouse' nurture group during Year 7 now follow a well-thought-out curriculum delivered by well-trained staff. This ensures that these pupils can transition seamlessly into mainstream classes when appropriate. You have ensured that teachers use the rich information that they are furnished with to support pupils with SEND well.

In addition to the deficiencies in the previous curriculum, you recognised that the delivery of the curriculum was not as effective as it could be. To remedy this, you have ensured that staff are suitably trained to deliver the curriculum well. The whole-school approach that you have implemented has improved the delivery of the curriculum considerably. For example, many teachers routinely choose activities that help pupils to revisit and build on prior learning.

Across most subjects, teachers are using assessment strategies more effectively to ensure that pupils are making better progress through the curriculum. However, you and other leaders recognise that there is more to do to ensure that assessment supports teachers to pinpoint where pupils' knowledge is not secure. In some instances, teachers still move on too quickly before pupils' essential knowledge is embedded. You have appropriate plans in place to address this.

You have also acted to prioritise reading. You and your leadership team understand how important it is that pupils of all ages can read fluently to access the full curriculum. More recently, staff have been trained to support pupils with their reading comprehension. Staff across the school, irrespective of their subject area, are now better equipped to develop pupils' reading knowledge in lessons. There is an increasingly strong focus on developing pupils' subject-specific vocabulary. This work is beginning to have impact, although it is in the early stages of implementation.

As well as this, you are working effectively with external advisors to provide phonics training for all staff. This is because you are aware that some pupils who struggle with their reading may not be getting the bespoke support that they need to catch up quickly enough. This is particularly true for some older pupils.

The previous inspection report highlighted that some disadvantaged pupils were not attending school regularly enough. You have worked successfully to raise the profile of attendance across the school, including through some key staffing appointments. These staff are strengthening relationships with parents and carers, raising their awareness of the importance of attendance. You plan to extend this work into the next academic year. However, some of your efforts in this area have been thwarted by the ongoing challenges relating to the pandemic.

Additional support

You have used support from within the archdiocese and the local authority effectively to enhance the curriculum expertise of your subject leaders. As well as this, you have sought the views of external consultants to strengthen your quality assurance of the curriculum. You and senior leaders welcome the support and challenge that external partners provide.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, pupils, staff, representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

I scrutinised documentation, visited lessons and reviewed examples of pupils' work. I also reviewed the school's self-evaluation document, the school improvement plan and evaluations of aspects of the school carried out by external partners.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Goodwin
Her Majesty's Inspector