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Andrew Nightingale
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Dear Mr Nightingale

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Matthew's RC High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 10 and 11 May 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in November 2022.

During the inspection, Charlotte Oles, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI) and I discussed with you and other senior leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust, other staff, trustees, governors and the local authority, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also visited lessons, met with pupils, other staff and carried out a scrutiny of documentation. We have considered all of this evidence in coming to our judgement.

St Matthews RC High School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the category of concern to be removed.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint early career teachers.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

You have been in post as headteacher since April 2023. Following the previous inspection, the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders have been redefined. A new designated

safeguarding leader has been appointed. Additional staff, to support the team that oversees pupils' welfare, have taken up post. On this first monitoring visit, we focused on safeguarding and pupils' personal development. We also considered your work to improve the behaviour and attendance of pupils. Additionally, we evaluated some aspects of the curriculum and the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

You, together with senior leaders and trust leaders, including the CEO, have accepted the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You have an accurate and realistic understanding of the progress that is being made against the areas for improvement. No one, not least you, underestimates the challenges that lie ahead. You have correctly identified that there is still much to do.

You have made safeguarding your top priority. You have worked closely with the safeguarding leaders in the local authority and in the trust. This collaboration has enabled you to improve the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. For example, the systems for reporting and recording safeguarding concerns are much more effective than they were in the past.

The profile of safeguarding has been raised across the school. You have ensured that staff are clear about the procedures that they must follow to report any concerns about a pupil's welfare. You and senior leaders are beginning to use information about safeguarding concerns more strategically to respond to patterns and trends across the school.

The work of the team that oversees pupils' welfare is proving to be successful. For instance, data shown to inspectors demonstrated that the proportion of pupils who choose not to go to their lessons has reduced considerably. Pupils and staff stated that behaviour has started to improve in lessons. School data on behaviour incidents confirm that this is the case. This means that, in some lessons, pupils enjoy the benefits of working in a respectful environment. However, you are aware that behaviour is still not good enough. Low-level disruption remains an issue in some lessons. This is because staff are not sufficiently well trained to ensure that they apply the behaviour policy consistently well.

There are signs that pupils' behaviour during social times is also improving. The introduction of clear routines and an increased staff presence around the school building are helping to make the transition between lessons calmer. However, leaders are keen to further build the trust of a minority of staff, parents, carers and pupils, some of whom lack confidence in the ability of adults to keep pupils safe when they are on the corridors and during social times.

The pupils who spoke to us explained that incidents of bullying, and other forms of discriminatory behaviour, have reduced. Pupils have greater confidence in adults to challenge such incidents now. They also believe that staff will listen to their concerns and

worries and take action to resolve them. Pupils are especially pleased that there are identified staff in each year group that they can turn to for help and advice.

Reducing pupils' absence from school is a key priority. You have increased the number of staff working on this aspect of school life. You are also ensuring that leaders and staff place greater emphasis on the importance of pupils attending school regularly and on time. This is having an impact with some pupils. Their attendance rates have risen. Even so, the proportion of pupils who are absent from school remains high.

You and other leaders are placing much greater emphasis on the provision to promote pupils' personal development. For example, personal, social and health education lessons and assemblies have a much greater focus on why homophobia, discrimination and racism are harmful and wrong. The information that you shared with us shows that incidents of derogatory language are decreasing over time.

Work is underway to further develop the quality of education that pupils receive. Subject leaders, supported by a range of expertise from within and outside of the trust, have begun to redesign their subject curriculums in key stage 3. Teachers and leaders have benefited from some subject-specific training to increase their delivering of the curriculum, including the development of pupils' literacy skills. However, much of this work is relatively new and there is limited evidence of impact at this point in time.

You have acted to ensure that pupils with SEND are receiving a better quality of education than they did in the past. Teachers have received some training on how to meet the needs of some pupils. You have also expanded the provision in the 'Beehive' to support those pupils with the highest level of need. Even so, pupils with SEND continue to have a variable experience. This is because some teachers do not have the knowledge or skills that they need to ensure that these pupils learn all that they should.

Reading is a high priority. You have identified those pupils with gaps in their reading knowledge and introduced a new programme to help pupils who find reading difficult. However, you are aware that this programme does not fully meet the needs of all of the pupils who require additional help. This means that some pupils are not getting the support that they need to improve their reading knowledge sufficiently well. This prevents these pupils from accessing the full curriculum. Your work to foster a love of reading across the school is at an early stage.

You have welcomed and accepted the support and expertise provided by the trust. This support has been used in a well-considered way to accelerate improvement. For example, leadership capacity has been strengthened by arranged support from a Trust Executive Leader.

New, experienced members of the local governing body have been appointed to strengthen leadership capacity. Trustees and governors are well informed about the progress that is being made to tackle the shortcomings at the school. For example, they

are gathering the views of pupils to check how well behaviour and the culture of safeguarding are improving.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the CEO of Emmaus Catholic Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Sharples
His Majesty's Inspector