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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Chris Heyes
Headteacher
St Anne's Church of England Academy
Hollin Lane
Middleton
Manchester
M24 6XN

Dear Mr Heyes

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of St Anne's Church of England Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 4 October 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 took place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school, parents and carers any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior and middle leaders, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, a group of trustees and governors and a representative of 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. I also met with groups of pupils and visited some lessons. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils who struggle the most with reading receive effective support so that they catch up quickly; and

- ensure that the curriculum for pupils in the current Year 11, and particularly those who are disadvantaged or have missed school in the past, takes account of any gaps in their prior knowledge.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have overseen several new appointments of senior and middle leaders. These appointments have bolstered the school's capacity for further improvements in the areas that were identified in the December 2021 inspection report. During the same period, the support provided to the school by the multi-academy trust has strengthened. You have also engaged with other local networks, for example a research school, to benefit from their expertise. In addition, the local governing committee has been re-established with delegated responsibility from the trust board. Their support and oversight have helped to ensure that the actions that you and other leaders have taken have been appropriate and sustainable.

With help from the trust, the curriculum has been strengthened. The choice of subjects that key stage 4 pupils can study is more ambitious than it was in the past. This reflects your increasing aspirations for pupils' achievement. Subject curriculums are well-organised. The curriculum identifies the essential knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn and remember. Added to this, there is a growing understanding of how teachers' assessment strategies should link closely to this knowledge. A programme of professional development is in place to address previous shortcomings in how teachers used these strategies. This is further along in some subjects than in others. You and other leaders recognise the importance of continuing to ensure consistency in the way that teachers deliver, and then check, learning.

The impact of these changes has not been reflected in published examination results. You recognise that the most recent outcomes for pupils' progress and attainment at the end of Year 11 were weak. This is attributable in part to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders at all levels are sharply focused on improving outcomes for current pupils. Pupils in key stage 3 are making the progress that they should through the new curriculum. However, some older pupils in key stage 4, and particularly in the current Year 11, have large gaps in their knowledge. This remains a barrier to their achievement.

You, trustees, governors and leaders at all levels recognise the fundamental importance of ensuring that pupils can read. A new system for identifying pupils who find reading difficult has led to a greater understanding of the gaps in these pupils' reading knowledge. Some of these pupils are receiving the help that they need. These pupils are beginning to catch up to their peers. However, other pupils who struggle to access the curriculum because of gaps in their reading knowledge do not get extra help. You have recently taken steps to increase the capacity for reading support further, including through additional training and a new appointment. This is to help those pupils most in need of support to benefit.

Alongside changes to the curriculum, you have taken a realistic and measured approach to other improvements that were needed in the school. For instance, you have sensibly prioritised improving pupils' attendance. This has been a barrier to pupils' learning in the past. You and other leaders have helped staff to raise their expectations of pupils. In turn, pupils are attending school more regularly than before. Some pupils also told me that they feel more positive about school. Although some challenging behaviours remain, they are being addressed. Previously high numbers of suspensions are beginning to fall.

Governors and trustees have a good understanding of the school's current position. They are realistic about the work that still needs to be done. The action plans that you shared with me are sensible and appropriate. However, leaders' evaluation of these has at times been over-generous. The support more recently provided by the trust is helping leaders to understand the impact of their actions. In turn, this is beginning to drive further improvements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the CEO of the Cranmer Education Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Manchester, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Rochdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Ben Hill
His Majesty's Inspector