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22 December 2023

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Dear Mrs Aspinwall

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of St Michael's Church of England High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 22 November 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 was judged to require improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspection.

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 and parents any improvements that the school has made since its previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, the head of school, the chief executive officer (CEO), the chair of the governing body, members of the Liverpool Diocesan Schools Trust board, including the chair of the trust board, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. I also spoke to a representative from the local authority and the Diocese of Liverpool. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited some lessons, held meetings with other staff and with pupils and scrutinised the school improvement plan and pupils' work. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

St. Michael's C of E High School continues to require improvement. Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.

The school should take further action to:

- support pupils in key stage 4 who find reading difficult and strengthen the opportunities to encourage and promote pupils' wider reading.

Main findings

Since the inspection in November 2022, there have been changes to the senior leadership in the school. The headteacher at the time of the inspection has left and the deputy headteacher was appointed as head of school in May 2023. You took up your position as executive headteacher in January 2023. Several new curriculum leaders have been appointed. The trust has appointed a trust quality assurance leader to work with the school.

The actions taken by the school and the trust, although suitable and appropriate, have not had a measurable impact on the outcomes for pupils so far. The provisional data for 2023 indicates that pupils' attainment and progress by the end of key stage 4 has declined. Both measures are significantly below the national average. While there is some sign of improvement at the end of Year 13, sixth form students did not attain as well as other students nationally in 2023.

Delays in the recruitment of some key staff meant that the improvements identified at the time of the inspection were implemented slowly. Recently, the school has increased the pace of improvement. With the support of the trust, new appointments have been made and a carefully structured programme of staff training is now in place. The school is also engaging productively with external providers and other schools to help with the design and implementation of the curriculum. Nevertheless, it is too soon to judge the impact of these actions on pupils' achievement.

Work to develop the curriculum is now underway. The key knowledge that pupils need to know and remember has been identified in many subject curriculums. In most subjects, the content is ordered logically so that pupils can make connections in their learning and build on what they already know. However, other subjects are not as far ahead. This means that teachers are less sure of what they should teach and when this content should be taught.

Teachers have received some training to develop their understanding of how to check pupils' learning. Even so, these assessment strategies are not used consistently well. As a result, some pupils do not have gaps in their knowledge or their misconceptions addressed. This means that their learning over time is not secure. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in the mainstream school access the same curriculum as their peers. However, the slower development of assessment methods and the development of some areas of the curriculum impairs the learning of these pupils, as it does their peers.

There are appropriate systems in place to identify the gaps that pupils in key stage 3 may have in their reading knowledge. Staff are suitably trained to provide effective support for those pupils who are struggling to read. As a result, pupils are growing in confidence and reading with greater fluency. However, this positive approach is not replicated for those pupils who find reading difficult in key stage 4. This means that they struggle to access their learning in other curriculum areas. The school have sought the views of pupils to

improve the library space and to promote a greater love of reading. Nevertheless, pupils said that they did not read widely or enjoy reading.

Many pupils, including those with SEND, are frequently absent from school. This remains a key barrier to their academic achievement. Up until recently, the school has been too slow in its response to poor attendance rates. However, recent changes in the school, supported by the trust, have increased the capacity within the administration team. As a result, the school is responding to and following up pupils' absence more robustly than it has in the past. This work is beginning to bear fruit. There are signs that some pupils are attending school more frequently than they did in the past. However, it is early days for many others who spend too much time away from school.

Careers education is delivered through the new daily lessons designed to develop pupils' life skills and to prepare them for the world of work. Pupils spoke about the careers that they might like to follow, including following apprenticeship routes, when they leave school. They have been taught about the technical and vocational qualifications that are available to them.

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

Yours sincerely

Niamh Howlett
His Majesty's Inspector