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Karl Mackey
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Dear Mr Mackey

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 30 January 2024, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in November 2022.

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 school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders and representatives of the multi-academy trust, the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection and my previous monitoring visit. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also scrutinised a range of documents relating to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour. I visited lessons, spoke to a range of pupils and observed social times. 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 be no longer judged as having serious weaknesses.

The progress made towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

Since the previous monitoring inspection, several senior leaders and other staff are new to the school. New appointments have been made to the senior leadership team with specific responsibility for attendance, behaviour and quality of education at the school. The focus of this second monitoring visit was to evaluate the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance, behaviour and engagement in their learning.

You have increased the capacity and expertise within your attendance team. Procedures for monitoring absent pupils are effective. Leaders understand the importance of checking on the most vulnerable pupils quickly if they do not attend school. There are now clear roles and responsibilities within the attendance team to ensure that all pupils are swiftly accounted for at the beginning of the day. Attendance procedures now contribute strongly towards a culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders have re-enforced the importance of attending school on time. Pupils who arrive late or without the correct equipment are well supported to prepare for the day ahead. The school now offers rewards for good attendance, which pupils spoke about with enthusiasm. Despite the determined efforts of the school, however, attendance remains too low. This is especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those in receipt of the pupil premium.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for how pupils should conduct themselves. This includes taking pride in their uniform and school environment. Several changes have been made at the school to ensure that movement between lessons is calm and that pupils are well supported. As a result, most pupils now feel more positive about their experience around the school building. They said there was always a teacher nearby if they needed to speak to someone. Physical changes to the school site are planned to ensure that pupils have safe and welcoming spaces to spend their social times.

Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy at the school. The majority of staff and pupils understand it well. Leaders know that there is more work to do to ensure that the policy is applied consistently across the school. However, leaders' records demonstrate that this new policy is helping to reduce incidents of poor behaviour. In lessons, this has been particularly effective. Pupils agree that fewer of their lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Staff use positive language and a range of rewards to recognise pupils who are working hard. This is helping to forge strong relationships between staff and pupils.

Pupils are beginning to benefit from a better educational experience at the school. Truancy has reduced, which means that pupils are more often in lessons. Because disruption to lessons has reduced, teachers can teach and pupils can focus. Leaders have identified pupils who need additional support with their behaviour or learning. New leaders have been appointed with responsibility for SEND and are now ensuring that the pupils who need support get it quickly. Because staffing at the school is now more stable, staff know pupils better. There is more work to do to ensure that lessons are adapted to meet the needs of all pupils well. The school knows this is the case.

The curriculum has been broadened with the addition of more creative subjects such as dance, drama and music. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about these lessons. Additionally, this has provided new enrichment experiences such as a talent show and whole-school production. Pupils value the opportunity to develop their skills and interests. This is particularly the case for some pupils who previously struggled to engage in education.

The trust has supported the school to increase leadership capacity aimed at improving teaching and learning. Leaders have also brokered external advice and guidance to help support school improvement priorities in this area. School leaders are reviewing teaching and learning strategies to ensure that pupils succeed in lessons and achieve their potential. Leaders are just beginning this process and much remains to be done to ensure that all pupils receive a high-quality education at the school. The school and trust know that external examination results must improve to give pupils the best chance of future success.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, and the CEO or equivalent of the Blessed Peter Snow Catholic Multi-Academy Trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Kirklees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

John Linkins
His Majesty's Inspector