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1 May 2019

Thomas Leverage
Principal
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Dear Mr Leverage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cardinal Wiseman Catholic School

Following my visit to your academy on 9 April 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that all pupils receive impartial advice and guidance about possible career pathways so that they are sufficiently well prepared for their next steps
- reduce the amount of time pupils miss from school by being persistently absent and engage further with parents to ensure that pupils attend regularly
- ensure that sixth-form students, especially in Year 12, attend all of their sessions.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, members of the local school improvement board (SIB) and the chair of the board of trustees from the multi academy company (MAC). The lead inspector met with a group of pastoral and academic middle leaders and evaluated the school's improvement and self-evaluation documents. The lead inspector and senior leaders visited classrooms in English, science, geography and history as part of learning walks, looked at pupils' books and sought pupils' views in discussions. The lead inspector observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, lesson changeover times and breaktime and spoke to many of them about their school. Staff were able to share their views in discussions with the lead inspector. The lead inspector also received five written notes from members of staff.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have made significant changes to the staffing structure in both senior and middle leadership and the main body of staff. Since your permanent appointment, you have brought some much-needed stability and made a number of important changes to the daily running of the school. As a result, standards at the school in many aspects have improved, most notably in the behaviour of the pupils.

Main findings

Since taking up the post as principal, you have introduced a new sense of purpose and energy to the school. You have changed the school's ethos and built on your knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. You know the school well, accurately evaluate its effectiveness and are focused on rapidly improving the standard of education for your pupils. Other senior leaders, most of whom are relatively new to their roles, are also making a positive contribution to the new direction. Staff, including middle leaders, are responding very well to the changes and are keen to continue to improve their classroom practice. Improvements are now clearly evident, for example, in pupils' behaviour, the new curriculum and in the quality of teaching and learning.

Since the previous inspection, the MAC has provided effective leadership support for the school through a period of transition and staffing issues. The executive headteacher and a colleague from the diocese commissioned support and have strengthened partnerships with other secondary schools. They have facilitated effective external reviews of the pupil premium funding and the quality of education in the sixth form. They continue to provide challenge and mentorship to you and your colleagues. Work is now under way to replace the temporary SIB with a permanent local academy board to provide a long-term governance structure to the school.

You and your leaders were proactive in addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. A new 'knowledge-based' curriculum was introduced together with a new and improved process for checking the effectiveness of assessment and teaching. Teaching is improving because staff are working productively together to refine their work and share best practice. They have responded well to training and the expectations that you shared with them. Classroom environments are calm and conducive to learning. Teachers requiring more intensive support have taken on board advice and, as a result, have made improvements to their practice; others have decided to leave the school. Staff are now involved in meetings to discuss the progress that their pupils are making. Middle leaders play an active role in the monitoring processes and contribute to improving the quality of teaching. Some teaching across the school remains mixed. This is because, in some cases, insufficient focus is given to pupils' learning.

You have implemented a new behaviour policy, the '100% compliance' system, which focuses on pupils' conduct and staff's high expectations of behaviour. While this is in the early stages of use, it is already proving an effective strategy. Behaviour in lessons has improved markedly. Incidences of poor behaviour have decreased sharply and pupils' behaviour during breaktime is, for the most part, calm and orderly. Pupils and staff agree that behaviour has improved dramatically. You use exclusions as a last resort and the school's information shows that far fewer pupils are now excluded from school. However, there remains a small minority of pupils who are not yet following your high behaviour expectations and for whom the use of exclusions and/or the school's isolation room is not working.

Attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. Processes to check on pupils who are not at school are effective and far fewer pupils are now regularly absent. This is a further testimony to the improved standards in the school as pupils now value their education. However, although the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has declined, it remains too high.

Your work to provide pupils with impartial careers information, advice and guidance is still not as well developed as it needs to be. For example, current Year 11 pupils did not have the option of attending work-related learning placements and it is not clear if current Year 10 pupils will be given this opportunity in the summer term. Information currently provided to pupils is not extensive and planned thoroughly enough to ensure that the school prepares pupils well enough for their next steps. Pupils commented negatively on this aspect of the school's work.

Your work to improve the quality of education in the sixth form has included a restructuring of the leadership and support provided to students. There is now a team to guide students and support their academic and personal development. Students commented positively on their sixth form. Leaders now offer a broad range of non-qualification activities and monitor students' participation in these. Students are encouraged to take part in activities that complement their possible career paths and give them a wider understanding of life at university. Staff now

provide support with applications to universities and offer detailed information about possible career pathways. As a result, all students who left the school's sixth form last academic year went on to higher education, training, employment or apprenticeships. More work needs to be done to ensure that students attend regularly, especially in Year 12.

In discussion with your staff, it was evident that they are all proud to work at the school and feel that, under your leadership, the school is moving forward. Staff say that the training and support they receive are helping them to become better practitioners. Teachers new to the profession spoke highly of the work you and your colleagues do to help them become strong classroom practitioners. All commented on the new ethos of high expectations of, and aspirations for, all pupils.

External support

You have engaged effectively with support provided by other schools. For example, reviews of the school's use of the pupil premium funding and the quality of education in the sixth form by a teaching school have highlighted some areas for improvement. You and your colleagues have acted on many of the suggestions made and the consequent improvements are evident. A clear strength is your willingness to engage with others in order continuously to improve your practice and the life chances of the young people at your school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Coventry. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke
Her Majesty's Inspector