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Dear Ms Dodds

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of St Felix Roman Catholic Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 13 September 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 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 and other senior leaders, the CEO of the trust, and governors 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 subject leaders, the early years leader, the special educational needs coordinator, teachers and support staff. I carried out visits to lessons from early years to Year 6, reviewed curriculum and safeguarding documentation, talked to a sample of pupils and looked at their work. 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 last inspection, leaders have worked closely with the trust to ensure that the right actions are being taken to improve the quality of education at your school. Leaders have the support of the staff team to make these improvements happen. The staff team is mostly unchanged since the previous inspection. The senior leadership team has provided stability to the school. Everyone I spoke to, at all levels, shows a determination to improve the curriculum and wants the best for every pupil.

There have been some recent changes to subject leadership. The special educational needs coordinator is also new to the school, although they are experienced. These leaders are in the process of familiarising themselves with their new subject areas and roles. There are also several new governors who have joined the school this year or changed roles.

The trust has set up a 'rapid improvement board' to oversee the progress being made by the school. Leaders, including governors, are benefiting from the support and challenge this board is providing.

Leaders and teachers have undertaken a detailed review of the curriculum to identify common knowledge gaps that pupils have and to ensure that all subjects are fully covered. This has led to a redesign of the curriculum from early years upwards. It is now very clear what, and by when, pupils need to be taught, including catching up with any learning missed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders have ensured that teachers know what prior learning pupils need to build on. This work has been extensive. Staff have undertaken training to familiarise themselves with the new curriculum design. The curriculum is now broader and more ambitious. However, there is still work to do to demonstrate that pupils are learning the revised curriculum as intended. Leaders and teachers also need to ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge are being successfully addressed so that pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.

Reading has also been a focus since the previous inspection. There is now a comprehensive reading curriculum in place from Nursery to Year 6. Pupils are exposed to a wider variety of diverse and engaging texts than they were previously. There are regular opportunities for pupils to develop their reading knowledge and understanding, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This reading curriculum has only recently been introduced. This means that pupils are not yet able to demonstrate a broad understanding of literature. Leaders understand that they need to do more to promote pupils' enjoyment of reading.

There remains a need to focus on the effective use of assessment. As teachers are still getting used to the new curriculum approach, they are not yet using assessment well enough to adapt activities precisely to the needs and abilities within their class. In reading, for example, some of the pupils find the work too easy or do not fully understand in detail what they are learning about. Teachers are getting better at assessing what

pupils have remembered from the curriculum. However, it is not clear yet how securely pupils are retaining the detailed knowledge leaders intend.

Leaders have ensured that staff are getting better at adapting learning activities in general. This means that pupils with SEND are able to complete work given to them with more independence. However, leaders accept that there is more to do to ensure that pupils with SEND have adapted activities which are sufficiently aspirational and specifically matched to their precise needs. This needs to happen for them to achieve as well as they could. This is an area that leaders have rightly identified as a priority.

There have been several changes at local governing board level. Many governors are new to the board or their role. The trust has provided valuable training and support to governors. As a result, governors are more aware of how to hold leaders to account. However, this training has only recently been completed. Governors need more time to show they can be an effective 'critical friend' and assess accurately how well the school is performing.

The trust is providing effective oversight of the school's improvement journey. In conjunction with leaders, the trust has ensured that a precise improvement plan is in place. This plan is being actioned effectively, and leaders and the improvement board keep the plan under regular review. The trust has ensured that the board comprises members with an appropriate skill set and expertise to ask the right questions and challenge where needed. As a result, the trust is taking the right courses of action, along with school leaders, to bring about sustainable improvement to the school. Leaders remain mindful of staff well-being and workload in implementing the changes needed.

Leaders have successfully addressed the area for improvement linked to safeguarding. Staff are clear on how to report concerns. All actions taken following a concern are now recorded on the central system.

School leaders have welcomed the external support brokered by the trust. The support has focused on supporting leaders with curriculum design and improving the quality of education. Leaders are demonstrating that the school is not over-reliant on this external support.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO or equivalent of the Our Lady of Walsingham multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of East Anglia, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sara Boyce

His Majesty's Inspector