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Dear Mr McCullagh

No formal designation inspection of The John Fisher School

Following my visit with Roary Pownall, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 16 March 2022, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and the time you took to discuss your school.

This inspection was conducted under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for no formal designation (NFD) inspections. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of leadership and management (including governance) and, in particular, leaders' and governors' work to promote and provide for the personal development of pupils at the school. These concerns arose from media reports that suggested a breakdown in governance arrangements. This appeared to be linked to the cancellation of a scheduled visit to the school by a children's author. Media reports also raised concerns about the school's provision for personal development and whether the school was fulfilling its statutory duties, including those under the Equality Act 2010.

We do not give graded judgements on NFD inspections. However, if we find evidence that overall standards may be declining, but no serious concerns are identified, then the next inspection will normally be a section 5 inspection and will be brought forward. If we have serious concerns, we will deem the NFD inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

Evidence

We met with you, leaders and staff, and looked at a range of documentation relating to the provision for pupils' personal development and well-being. This included curriculum planning and resources, as well as information on how leaders and staff respond to

incidents of bullying, and discriminatory or prejudicial behaviour. We scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks on staff. We also considered whether leaders take suitable action when concerns are raised about the conduct of adults working in the school.

Discussions were held with former and current members of the governing body and a representative from the Archdiocese of Southwark. We also met with a representative from Sutton local authority. We met with a group of parents and carers, and considered the 306 responses to Ofsted's survey, Parent View, including written comments. We also reviewed the 100 responses to the staff survey and 216 responses to the pupil survey. We observed pupils' behaviour and conduct at different points during the school day.

Context

This school is larger than the average secondary school. Currently, 1,189 pupils are on roll. Pupils come from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than average, as is the overall proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Main findings

This is a caring community, where all pupils are welcomed and included in the 'Fisher Family'. The work of leaders and staff is guided by shared values, centred on dignity and respect for the individual. These values provide a unifying thread for all aspects of school life, and in particular, the personal development curriculum. Pupils described the school as one where, 'everyone just fits in', irrespective of faith, background or sexuality. They said that leaders and staff make clear that, 'it is okay to just be you'. Pupils are rightly proud that this is the case.

Pupils' conduct and attitudes reflect the high expectations that leaders and staff have of them. Positive character traits, such as perseverance, service and integrity, are routinely promoted, celebrated and modelled by staff. Pupils learn how these qualities can help them to achieve their personal goals, as well as to be considerate members of the community. Beyond the taught curriculum, pupils enjoy the range of trips and clubs on offer, especially in sports and music. This extra-curricular provision has been developed purposefully, with the aim of fostering pupils' talents and interests.

Each part of the personal development curriculum is planned to develop pupils' readiness for life in modern Britain, both now and in the future. The knowledge taught, for instance in personal, social, health and economic education, is selected carefully and delivered sequentially. This means that, over time, pupils deepen their understanding of important concepts, such as respect, tolerance and service. The curriculum also includes experiences designed to help pupils become responsible and confident young people. Within school, leaders regularly seek and act on pupils' ideas. For instance, following a suggestion from the school council, 'water Wednesdays' were introduced each week. This was because pupils wanted to promote the role that drinking enough water plays in

keeping healthy. Pupils also contribute to a wide range of community projects. For instance, some sixth-form students recently took part in a national campaign to end violence against women and girls.

Leaders and staff make sure that pupils have plentiful opportunities to consider the views and experiences of others. This includes discussing sensitive issues related to social justice, such as racist or intolerant attitudes. Pupils said that this helps them to recognise prejudice as well as develop the confidence to call out discriminatory behaviours or opinions. While rare, any bullying or incidents of derogatory language are managed effectively. Pupils know that such behaviours are not tolerated. They learn about how their choice of language can affect others, including when it would be considered discriminatory or could cause offence.

Relationships and sex education is comprehensive and meets the expectations set out in government guidance. Pupils are taught the importance of respect for all, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. This is complemented by other aspects of the curriculum: for example, pupils learn about how British values shape modern society. Pupils spoke with maturity about what they are taught and how they try to apply their understanding in their day-to-day lives. They are clear that everyone should be valued equally, and that difference and similarities represent the richness of human experience.

Pupils are also taught age-appropriate information about positive and healthy relationships, including consent. Staff ensure that pupils feel confident in raising and talking about potentially sensitive topics, for instance those related to pornography, sexting and harmful sexual behaviour. Staff deliver the curriculum with confidence because leaders ensure that they are well trained and knowledgeable. Pupils appreciate that they receive clear, factual information and that any questions they have are handled sensitively.

Pastoral care is strong, with pupils' individual needs and circumstances front and centre. Leaders have created a culture of openness, underpinned by effective systems for pupils to raise any worries that they might have. For instance, specifically trained 'well-being listeners' are always on hand for pupils to share any worries or concerns. Pupils who are experiencing difficulties benefit from tailored approaches, drawing on support from external professionals when needed. Leaders join up all the information available to them on pupils' welfare. They make sure that pupils receive the right level of help at the right time. Pupils feel listened to and well supported. They know that concerns will be taken seriously and acted on.

The personal development provision is well led. Leaders and staff are not prepared to rest on their laurels. They continually seek out ways to enhance what is on offer. Leaders' decisions are informed by their own evaluation of what is working well, as well as the views of pupils and staff. You and your team have also valued support and challenge from governors in your work to improve the school.

Leaders recently invited a well-known, published children's author to visit the school to talk about his career and the publication process. This visit was a planned part of the curriculum offer. Some of the author's books feature gay characters and their experiences. The archdiocese deemed that this visit fell outside the scope of what is permissible in a Catholic school and recommended that leaders cancel it. The governing body voted, by a majority, in favour of leaders' decision not to cancel the author's visit. Two governors subsequently resigned, and the archdiocese informed the remaining governors that they had been removed from their posts. This included elected parent and staff governors, as well as the local authority governor. The archdiocese intended to replace the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB). While the Catholic Church retains control of governance in Catholic schools, the archdiocese's attempt to impose an IEB was made unilaterally and without due regard to the published statutory guidance regarding the appointment of IEBs. Parent, staff and local authority governors have since been reinstated, and these members continue to provide support to you and your team. At the time of this inspection, plans were also under way to fill the vacant foundation governor posts. It is essential that all parties take swift and suitable steps to finalise suitable governance arrangements, and in turn ensure that the governing body can function fully and effectively.

These events, including the media attention that has come with them, have unnerved and upset many in the school community. Some leaders, staff and pupils have been left feeling angry, confused and frustrated. Others are worried about the impression these events might give of the school's ethos. You and your team are steering the school well through this difficult time. Crucially, leaders and staff are focusing on making sure that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The school continues to provide a calm and orderly atmosphere, in which pupils' learning and well-being are prioritised. Pupils are also receiving additional guidance to help them make sense of recent events. You are identifying those pupils who may be personally affected and putting in place further layers of support tailored to individual need or circumstance. In the main, parents are highly supportive of leaders' work. They appreciate the way their children's pastoral care and personal development are provided for and continue to be prioritised. The majority of parents who responded to Parent View would recommend this school.

Additional support

In responding to recent events, you and the remaining, reinstated governors have welcomed the support of, and guidance from, Sutton, Croydon and Southwark local authorities. Leaders and staff are also working in close partnership with external professionals, including those from the educational psychology service, to provide extra support for pupils' mental health and well-being.

Priorities for further improvement

- Immediate steps must be taken to restore stability to governance, and in turn ensure that leadership is provided with the support and challenge needed to build further on the school's strong provision for pupils' personal development.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Southwark, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sutton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Murphy
Her Majesty's Inspector