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Mrs Vicky Godley
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Dear Mrs Godley

Monitoring inspection of St Sampson's High School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 28 June 2023 and 29 June 2023 on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 35 of the Education Law (Guernsey) 1970 and was the first monitoring inspection since the graded inspection that took place in June 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders and a representative from the Education Office, 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 visited lessons, held discussions with curriculum and pastoral leaders, teachers and support staff, met with groups of pupils and observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

St Sampson's High School is making the following progress towards addressing the indicators identified as inadequate at the previous inspection. (In schools with inadequate indicators we do not report on indicators that require improvement unless they are relevant to the inadequate indicator.)

Quality of Education

Leaders are making progress to improve this key indicator.

Behaviour and attitudes

Leaders are making progress to improve this key indicator.

Leadership and management

Leaders are making progress to improve this key indicator.

The progress made towards the removal of inadequate key indicators

Since the previous inspection, there have been substantial changes to the leadership of the school. All senior leaders, with the exception of the headteacher, are new in post. Despite their tenure being at any early stage, they have developed into a cohesive and enthusiastic team that is respected by staff. There has also been considerable staff turnover, with 15 new staff starting at the school since the beginning of this academic year. Currently, there are teaching vacancies that remain unfilled. Leaders report that appointments have been made, so there will be a full complement of staff in post from the beginning of the next academic year. There is an optimism that this will further increase capacity and sustain the momentum for school improvement.

Against the backdrop of this instability in staffing, leaders have pushed ahead with determination to remedy the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Instrumental to this has been leaders' work to galvanise the efforts and gain the confidence of all staff. Leaders have achieved considerable success with this objective. There is now a shared endeavour to make the improvements needed. Staff describe this as 'a wonderful journey' and are proud of what the school has achieved so far. Nonetheless, leaders have not rested on their laurels, recognising that there is still more work to do to improve the quality of education that pupils receive.

There is a strong sentiment among staff and pupils that behaviour at the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. It is in this area that leaders have made the most notable improvements. Classrooms are purposeful places to learn and pupils understand the expectations that staff have of them. Leaders' approach to managing behaviour is helping some pupils to improve their behaviour. While there remain some pupils who have negative views of school and make poor choices in how they relate to others, such pupils are in the minority. Those pupils who are subject to sanctions, because of their behaviour, recognise that the consequences are proportionate, understood and fair. The clarity and simplicity of the approach to how staff manage pupils' behaviour means that pupils notice more acutely when staff do not implement the agreed approaches. Where there are such inconsistencies, pupils' behaviour is not as well managed.

Leaders have a strong overview of patterns of behaviour and the reasons why exclusions from school have been made. However, the latter remain higher than leaders would like. Contributory reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, it is a result of leaders establishing the high expectations they have of pupils. Secondly, it is reflective of leaders' work to record all exclusions precisely, so they have an accurate oversight of why this course of action has been taken. Leaders identify specific themes. They use this information to support groups of pupils or to inform their planning of the personal development curriculum.

Leaders have had a sharp focus on the way in which staff deal with incidents of bullying. There has been considerable work completed to ensure that pupils understand what constitutes bullying and to extend the ways in which they can report concerns. This is making a positive difference to the frequency and the nature of such incidents. Some pupils act as 'anti-bullying ambassadors,' a role that they take great pride in and devote considerable energy to. They are wonderful advocates for the school. They know their role is to support, educate and inspire positive action among their peers. Overall, this combined approach from staff and pupils means that pupils increasingly feel safe on the school site. They are confident that staff will respond to their concerns. However, there is still more work to do here as this is not reflective of some pupils' experience of school. The increasing sense of pupils' ease while at school has also translated into improved attendance. There is, however, scope for further improvement, particularly in how well pupils are supported to catch up with their learning when they have been absent.

Leaders' work to develop the curriculum is at an early stage. Leaders have established consistent expectations of classroom practice, through the use of 'learning modes,' for example. Leaders check regularly that pupils experience the quality of education that they intend. Subject leaders, staff and pupils are involved in this process.

Subject leaders are aligned to leaders' vision. They value the professional development they receive, to support them to lead their subject with confidence. At present, however, the emphasis is too much on how the curriculum is taught. There is not yet a fully developed understanding of the crucial knowledge that pupils need to learn, the curriculum goals that teachers expect pupils to reach, or how the curriculum is best sequenced to support pupils to build up their subject knowledge over time. As a result, teachers' use of assessment is not planned and aligned precisely to check whether pupils have learned the curriculum as intended.

The support that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive has had a renewed emphasis. There are strong pastoral interventions in place, particularly for those pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour. Staff have received training as to how they can best support pupils with their learning. They receive detailed information about pupils' needs and suggested strategies to meet these. However, teaching is not routinely informed by the information that teachers receive. Pupils engage positively with what they have been asked to do, but do not have the prior knowledge they need to do this well. Therefore, pupils with SEND sometimes flounder in their learning.

Pupils who struggle with reading are identified and receive extra support. However, there is not a coherent approach to how such pupils are supported to read well in different subjects. Staff understand the importance of supporting pupils to read better, but do not fully understand how they can support them to do so.

As a result of the actions taken since the inspection, safeguarding has improved and is now effective.

Leaders are knowledgeable about the needs of pupils and their families. Leaders advocate for pupils, provide support and challenge when they are not satisfied with the resolution of a safeguarding referral. Record keeping is well ordered, which affords leaders the clarity needed to inform future actions.

Staff receive relevant and informative safeguarding training. They regularly discuss safeguarding cases and are mindful of pupils' circumstances. They know what to be vigilant for and how to report concerns when these arise. Leaders, in turn, take effective action to protect children. This includes work with external agencies and appropriate referrals to safeguarding partners.

Pupils know who to report any concerns to. Specially-trained staff are easily identifiable and visible around the school site. This has increased pupils' confidence to share their concerns with staff.

Leaders work closely with the Education Office who provide support and pose challenge. Nonetheless, action planning for different priorities within the school, while detailed, lacks precision and associated timescales. For example, leaders lack a sharp enough understanding of the underlying issues that have resulted in underachievement at key stage 4 overall, but particularly by pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. Leaders' strategic planning is too heavily focused on the narrative of the actions to be taken rather than the impact that these actions have. Therefore, it is difficult for leaders to pinpoint the strategies that are working and those that are not.

I am copying this letter to the Education Office who will publish it on the States of Guernsey website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
His Majesty's Inspector