



ST. MATTHEW'S
ROMAN CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
Voluntary Academy



EMMAUS
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

Friday 3rd February 2023

Dear Parents/Carers

The publication and sharing of the recent Ofsted report about St Matthew's RC High School has clearly been a significant event for the school and community. As you will be aware, the content of the report is negative and does not highlight any of the many positive aspects of the school. We remain disappointed by this, but at the same time we acknowledge there are several areas of school which must improve rapidly and we are committed to ensuring this is the case.

The school joined the Emmaus Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) in June 2021, we are a growing Trust with a leadership track record for improving standards and outcomes. It is evident that the support the school has received since the previous inspection in 2017 has not had the positive impact expected on improving the culture of the school. The welfare and education of our pupils is at the heart of what we do. As the school mission statement declares we care for everyone in our school community and are saddened that this is not reflected in the recent inspection.

Emmaus CAT recently appointed Mr Lee Ormsby as an Emmaus Executive Leader. Mr Ormsby has extensive experience of leading Catholic schools in a variety of contexts, including two headships in secondary schools and a deputy headship in an 11 – 18 school. His experience of supporting other schools includes mentoring new headteachers and leaders, working with schools in difficulty and working between two schools as the Executive Headteacher. Mr Ormsby is also a designated system leader, Local Leader of Education (LLE) as well as Chair of a partnership that includes six secondary schools, two sixth-form colleges and a special school. Our Lady's RC High, Manchester, Mr Ormsby's current school had always been judged less than 'Good' prior to his appointment in 2015; since then, there have been two Ofsted inspections where the judgement has been 'Good'.

Mr Ormsby has already started working alongside leaders and staff at St Matthew's to add capacity and a clear strategic direction for the school. The post Ofsted Action Plan, addressing the issues raised in the recent Ofsted Inspection Report has been developed and is now being implemented.

Emmaus CAT have also appointed Mr Andrew Nightingale as an Associate Headteacher. Mr Nightingale, who will join Emmaus CAT from a post of headteacher in Liverpool, will work full time at St Matthew's RC High as Associate Headteacher from Easter 2023. He has an excellent track record of senior leadership in schools in difficult circumstances, and this experience will play a significant role in guiding the school on the next phase of our journey of improvement.

The Diocese of Salford have appointed four new Foundation Governors to serve the school, join the Local Governing Body to support and challenge school leaders.

We believe the capacity added to the school leadership and governance and with the support and leadership the Trust brings we will continue to see improvements for the pupils at St. Matthew's.

We would like to thank all those who have shared feedback and raised questions over the past few weeks, the responses have been collated. Please refer to the FAQ document attached with this letter. Over the next few weeks there will be further communication from the Local Governing Body with opportunities for parents to join a forum, representative of the school community, to ensure communication and the strategic direction of the school is shared more frequently and clearly.

We want St Matthew's RC High to be a sustainably great school serving the community and we look forward to working with our students, families and the community to ensure this is the case. We thank you for your continued support for the school and community.

Yours sincerely



Daniel Copley

CEO

Emmaus Catholic Academy Trust

On behalf of the Local Governing Body of St Matthew's RC High School

Frequently Asked Questions from parents/carers and our feedback

In the last week senior leaders have spoken to many parents on the phone, in face-to-face meetings and at Year 7 parents' evening last Thursday. We have also spent time reading the comments and questions submitted via the form in Edulink. This process has been very informative and we are very grateful to all parents/carers who have taken the time to let us know your views. What comes across very strongly from this interaction is the concern you have for your children's education and a real desire to help us improve the school for the benefit of all. Understandably you are concerned by what has been written, but at the same time we appreciate many of the messages of support which have been submitted, with many of you commenting on the positive experiences enjoyed by your children at St Matthew's.

As part of our ongoing journey of improvement the support of parents/carers will be vital, and we know that you wish to be kept fully informed of what actions are being taken to make our school better. Below is a series of responses to the most frequently asked questions raised in the last week.

What is the current situation with the leadership of the school?

Mr Atkin, Deputy Headteacher, is responsible for the day to day running of the school along with Mr Passarello and the other senior leaders. The wider strategic leadership of the school is being guided by Mr Lee Ormsby, the headteacher of Our Lady's RC High School, Blackley, who has recently been appointed by the Emmaus Catholic Academy Trust as an Executive Leader. This support involves visiting the school several times per week to discuss and advise on decision-making and to offer advice on what improvements should be made. Our Lady's High School is of a similar size and location to ours and is very successful: it is currently graded 'Good' by Ofsted and examination results are above local and national averages.

The Emmaus Trust has now recruited an Associate Headteacher, Mr Andrew Nightingale, who will join Emmaus from a post of headteacher in Liverpool. His first role within the Trust will be to support St Matthew's and he will work full-time at our school from Easter 2023. He has an excellent track record of senior leadership in schools in difficult circumstances, and this experience will play a significant role in guiding us on the next phase of our journey of improvement.

What is being done to improve the school?

We have drawn up an action plan which addresses the 9 areas for improvement outlined in the Ofsted report and this has now started to be implemented. Some of the most important aspects of the action plan are detailed below.

Is my child safe?

Yes. The safety of children is our number one priority. The issues raised in the report about safeguarding were concerns around record-keeping and that some cases had been reported, followed up by a member of staff but had not been 'closed'. We have now changed our procedures to ensure that all safeguarding cases are followed up to closure as efficiently as possible etc. We have also allocated more staff to safeguarding to ensure that this happens.

Like any large secondary school fights do occasionally take place between students and these are dealt with appropriately. Contrary to some rumours there are not 'fights every day'. We keep very accurate records of all behaviour incidents and our statistics on violent behaviour show a significant decrease in the last 12 months.

What is being done to improve behaviour?

Work to improve the culture and climate around the school has been ongoing since the summer term in 2022 when we recognised that this was an area we needed to focus on. We have started to specifically

teach 'expected behaviour' to our students and you will be aware of some of this work by the information which has been sent home. We have kept messaging very simple with themes such as 'Hands Off' and 'Words Hurt' and this will continue throughout this year. Each theme is delivered to students through assemblies, the PSHE curriculum and form time. Our 'Orientation Day' on Monday 9th January was also part of this strategy and enabled staff to spend time with students explaining how we expect them to behave both in the classroom and in communal areas of school. The aim of this work is to create a calm, safe, purposeful atmosphere in all parts of the building.

Alongside this drive on positive behaviour we have moved to strengthen our response to negative behaviour. We have expanded our internal exclusion provision by moving our isolation facility to a larger room and invested in extra staff to supervise this. We have increased the number of staff who are on corridor duty which means that any negative behaviour in classrooms can be dealt with efficiently, removing disruptive students to enable staff to teach and our students to learn. We have also identified a number of students in each year group who cause the most disruption to learning and meetings with parents/carers have been arranged to discuss these issues. Targets have been agreed for improvement with a clear message that if improvements are not made then their place at the school is at risk.

My son/daughter has a supply teacher for a specific subject. What's being done about that?

Like any large organisation there will always be some degree of staff movement. We currently have 97% of all staff roles filled with long-term staff, but there are some inevitable short-term gaps. We have been working hard all year to ensure that we have excellent teachers in all subjects. However there is a national shortage of teachers, especially in subjects like maths, which makes this difficult. We have recently made some key appointments with strong teachers joining us in January and we continue to work hard each week to find good teachers to join us. Some parents asked about the number of jobs advertised in the 'Vacancies' section of the school website. This is because we have invested extra funding to recruit stronger staff and is not an indication that there is an immediate need for teachers in all of these subjects. If you do have any specific concerns about a particular subject please use the Contact@smrchs.com email address and this will be forwarded to the relevant person.

What were the 'sexual behaviours' mentioned?

The comment in the report about sexual behaviours related to an incident of attempted up-skirt filming by a male student using a mobile phone. The student was given an appropriate sanction and parents were heavily involved. Some female students who spoke to inspectors also mentioned inappropriate touching by boys in busy areas of the school.

What has been done to address this?

This is something we take incredibly seriously. Our PSHE curriculum and assembly content has been modified to ensure students are taught that this behaviour is a criminal offence. Our ongoing 'Hands Off' campaign makes it very clear that students should respect each other's personal physical space at all times. This applies to all students, regardless of gender and is aimed at promoting a safe environment for all. Behaviour of this nature will not be tolerated and anyone found doing this will be issued a serious consequence.

The use of mobile phones during the school day is not allowed. Parents/carers can support us with this by reminding their children of this rule but also by not texting or calling children on their devices when they are at school. If you do need to send a message to your son/daughter then please ring reception and we will ensure this message is communicated.

I am concerned by the comments about racism/homophobia/misogyny in the report.

As a Catholic school serving a diverse community we were particularly disappointed in the exaggerated comments in the Ofsted report relating to these areas. We accept that there have been some incidents of

this nature but these are few and far between and have been dealt with. We are committed to creating a school built on acceptance and tolerance for all, but we have taken some specific steps to improve in this area since November.

Our assemblies and PSHE curriculum, mentioned previously, have been adapted to include sessions on appropriate and inappropriate language – ‘Words Hurt’ - which covers all aspects of prejudice. Our ongoing theme for this term is ‘We Belong’, which means that students hear the message each week that we are all unique and special and all are welcome at our school, regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or any other protected characteristic. We have been educating students on the Equality Act and what this means in our school and in today’s society. We have booked a charity called ‘Kids of Colour’ to visit our school this term to speak to students, you can read more about their work at www.kidsofcolour.com. This group is highly recommended by other schools in the local area who have used them and who have seen a very positive impact following their visit. A brand-new Gay/Straight Alliance group is launched this week, consisting of staff and student volunteers who will work together to ensure our school is as inclusive as possible. We have also started an Equality Group which is another voluntary group whose key aim is to celebrate the diverse nature of St Matthew’s, and who have written our new St Matthew’s Equality Manifesto. This outlines our commitment to equality and how all staff and students must behave to ensure we are a truly inclusive and accepting community.

Why does the report say the curriculum is not properly covered?

We can assure all parents/carers that our planned curriculum for all subject areas does cover the required national curriculum in full. We have completed a lot of work in the last two years around this and we have had two separate full audits by trained Ofsted (HMI) inspectors to ensure this is correct. Both of these audits concluded that our planned curriculum is certainly ‘fit for purpose’. The comment in the report is because during the inspection it was felt that insufficient time was dedicated to certain topics in some subject areas. Curriculum review (checking exactly what is taught to each year group, when it is taught and for how long) is an ongoing piece of work. However this has now been redesigned for the next two terms following input and advice. We are very confident that this will lead to an even stronger curriculum for all our students.

What is being done to help Year 11 students prepare for their exams?

The PPE (mock exam) results from December have now been fully analysed and each subject area has created an action plan to ensure everything is being done to maximise improvement. Each subject leader has met with the senior team to ensure their plans are fit for purpose. All students have been given feedback on their performance and what they need to do to improve; staff speak to students regularly about the need to take responsibility for their own revision and learning and students have been given resources and techniques to make their revision effective. Lesson 6 continues after school each week: Maths (Monday), English (Tuesday) and Science (Wednesday), with several other departments running sessions at other times, including before school, lunchtimes and on Friday afternoons. We have recruited extra graduate tutors for English, Maths and Science (8 in total) who work with our Year 11 students during lesson time and after school to offer small group tuition for students who need this specific help. We have made some staffing changes since Christmas to ensure that our strongest teachers are teaching the Y11 classes in the run up to their final exams. There is also a clear Y11 Achievement Strategy which maps out exactly what is happening each week between now and June, including extra classes during February half-term and the Easter holidays. Further information about these opportunities for extra study will be communicated to parents nearer the time.

We hope that the above information will reassure parents and carers that action is already being taken to address the areas for improvement highlighted in the Ofsted report. If you have any further questions, comments or would like to book a meeting with a senior member of staff, please email contact@smrchs.com. All feedback will be gratefully received and will help inform further communication in the coming weeks.