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Mr Mike Colcombe
Interim Headteacher
St Pius X RC Primary School
Gatehouse Avenue
Withywood
Bristol
BS13 9AB

Dear Mr Colcombe

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Pius X RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 and 10 May 2013, 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 during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for City of Bristol.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2012

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching by:
 - giving honest and accurate feedback to teachers on how to improve their teaching
 - making sure staff training meets the specific needs of individual teachers and assistants
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessments, and using the information about pupils' attainment to set pupils' work at the right level for their different abilities
 - making sure that teachers ask pupils probing questions and deal quickly with any misunderstandings
 - making sure pupils are kept busy learning and understand what they have to do in lessons.

- Raise achievement in literacy by:
 - making sure all staff say the sounds that letters make accurately
 - organising reading lessons so that all pupils know what they are learning, and the books they are reading match the level of their ability
 - encouraging pupils to write at length more frequently
 - spending more time talking with children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- Improve the checks leaders and managers make on how well the school is doing by:
 - identifying why pupils are not achieving well enough, taking swift action to tackle weaknesses, and making sure managers and teachers are held responsible for how well the pupils do in their work
 - checking on how well money, in particular the additional government funding (Pupil Premium), is being used to raise standards
 - looking at the results of the checks that are made of teaching, and using the outcomes to see how the school can be improved rapidly.

- Improve the governance of the school by making sure members of the governing body:
 - review the pupils' progress more often so they can challenge the school leaders about it on a more frequent basis
 - are provided, by the school, with accurate information about the progress younger pupils are making in reading.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 9–10 May 2013

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, deputy headteacher, staff, members of the governing body, the school's improvement officer and a local authority consultant, and the Director of Schools and Colleges from the Diocese. The inspector spoke to pupils informally. Lessons were observed in all classes, four of which were joint observations with the interim headteacher.

Context

The headteacher remains on long-term sickness leave. The school is currently led by an interim headteacher from a local primary academy for three days each week. The local authority consultant leads the school on one day and the deputy headteacher on the remaining day. This arrangement is due to continue until, at least, the end of the summer term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The local authority consultant, who was leading the school for part of the week at the first visit, has led a number of training sessions to improve assessment. As a result, teachers' checks on pupils' attainment are now more accurate. However, this has taken time and the school has only had accurate information on each pupil's attainment in reading, writing and mathematics from April. Consequently, too little time has passed for the school to demonstrate that pupils' achievement is improving.

The interim headteacher has not delayed in using the new assessments. He has held meetings with all teachers, to review every pupil's attainment in the school. Teachers know that the pupils who have not achieved well enough in the past need to catch up quickly. With guidance from the interim headteacher, they have identified ways of doing this and know that pupils' progress will be checked again, twice, before the end of this academic year. These developments are positive but quite recent. There are too many pupils who have not made enough progress in reading and writing since the last inspection, particularly in Years 1 to 3, and who need to make at least good progress from now on. The coming months are of vital importance for the school in making sure that both the teachers' plans and the additional support are precisely targeted to help pupils make accelerated progress.

The interim headteacher has brought in extra support from his own school, which is being targeted well. For example, a programme of training in phonics (the sounds that letters make) is under way. All pupils have been assessed, through the partner school's support, to find out their current level of attainment in reading. The pupils are pleased that they know where they are on the reading programme and several

spoke about wanting to get to the next colour band. Parents and carers also know their children's stages in the programme. This is a positive development in improving pupils' progress in reading.

The quality of teaching

The training from the local authority consultants has had most impact higher up the school. Teaching is showing more improvement in Years 4, 5 and 6 than in other years. During the visit, teachers in Years 4 to 6 used a range of techniques and approaches to capture pupils' interest and prompt them to work hard. Lessons moved at a lively pace. For example, in one mathematics lesson, pupils worked individually, in pairs and then in a group of three, which kept all pupils involved and motivated. In two lessons, the teachers used visual material such as film clips and quizzes to stimulate a writing task and to test pupils' knowledge.

While these strengths are promising, they are not yet seen in all year groups. Teaching in Reception to Year 3 is not improving to the same extent. Teachers are experimenting with some of the strategies that have been introduced through training sessions and that are widely used in schools nationally. However, these do not always lead to adequate learning for the pupils. For example, teachers ask pupils to say whether they understand, or feel they have succeeded on a task, by using thumbs up or thumbs down. This approach is not always followed up to help those who are still unsure. Some teachers are tending to follow a set pattern when structuring their lessons without adjusting their teaching when pupils do not understand, find the work too easy or start to lose concentration and interest.

The quality of teachers' questioning remains inconsistent. Some teachers use questions well, to check, probe and make pupils think. However, too often, questions are directed to the whole class rather than being targeted, for example, to take account of different pupils' capabilities and needs. Teachers are still tending to talk too much, or only ask pupils who call out or have their hands up, which leaves other pupils – often the quieter ones - uninvolved. On these occasions, the quality of pupils' learning dips because too many pupils are sitting passively, listening, or having to do work that is not at the right level for them. In a writing lesson, for example, the teacher spent a considerable time reminding pupils of very basic writing skills, geared towards the lower-ability pupils in the class. This left the more-able pupils marking time when they could have started their own writing much earlier in the lesson.

In almost all classes, teachers have created a lively, attractive environment for pupils to learn. This is less effective in the Reception class. Although the school has invested a considerable amount of money on resources for the children in Reception, the classroom is rather barren and uninviting. One of the lessons observed was disorganised and not planned well enough. The children who chose to be inside were allowed to wander for far too long without engaging in purposeful activities.

In the lessons seen during the visit, teaching assistants had a variable impact on pupils' learning. Some are proactive in lessons, judging when to intervene and support. They are clear about the main intention of the lesson so their support is relevant and helpful. On these occasions, the teaching assistants make a positive difference to pupils' learning. In the Reception class, the teaching assistant supported children's learning and development effectively in the outside area, judging when to intervene and encourage. In other cases, teaching assistants made very little contribution, sitting apart from the pupils, for example, and listening to the teacher for prolonged periods of time.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The interim headteacher has reviewed and revised the school's behaviour policy. Several pupils told the inspector what happened if others were naughty. They know the series of sanctions that will be used, from informal warnings to being sent to the headteacher. Teachers are pleased to have very clear guidance and the early stages of the policy were seen working successfully on several occasions during the monitoring inspection. No inadequate behaviour was observed, although pupils told the inspector that their lessons are sometimes affected by one or two pupils misbehaving.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The representatives from the local authority, who co-led the school in the headteacher's absence, have focused appropriately on the priorities from the section 5 inspection. The school's improvement plan has been amended in the light of the recommendations from the first visit. Now that an interim headteacher has been appointed, this has freed up the school's improvement officer to take a more objective role in monitoring the school's progress. The period since the inspection has been an uncertain time for the staff, who have not been sure whether the headteacher was due to return. The appointment of the interim headteacher has helped to provide some continuity for the remaining months in this academic year. The local authority is working closely with the Diocese and the governing body to make suitable arrangements for the leadership of the school from the autumn term onwards.

The leaders' drive to improve teaching has led to some improvement higher up the school but not enough lower down the school. The quality of teaching varied widely on this visit, with some inadequate teaching observed.

Since the interim headteacher's appointment, he has not let any time lapse and has observed lessons in all classes, to find out about the quality of teaching. The joint observations carried out during this visit show that the interim headteacher's judgements on teaching are accurate. Teachers have received helpful feedback

following his observations, particularly on aspects of the teaching that could be improved. The written comments focus less on the quality of pupils' learning, particularly the learning of different groups. This is becoming increasingly important now that teachers are in a stronger position to focus carefully on the individuals and groups that need to make rapid progress.

Governance is improving. Members of the governing body have a better knowledge of their roles and are asking more challenging, helpful questions to support the strategic leadership of the school. The governing body minutes do not yet show that the areas for improvement, from the section 5 inspection, are regularly reviewed. The Vice-Chair of the Governing Body comes from an educational background and has a good knowledge of the outline information on pupils' progress that has come from the April assessments. Governors are well aware that the focus of all leaders needs to be on pupils' progress picking up strongly over the coming months. Governors are mindful of the need to keep parents and carers in touch with the school's improvements and have recently launched a newsletter with this in mind.

External support

Since the inspection, the school has been heavily reliant on support from the local authority. Until the appointment of the interim headteacher, in mid-February, the school was co-led by the local authority's school improvement officer and a consultant. A programme of training, by consultants, has focused mainly on improving the quality of teaching. This is entirely appropriate. Teachers have responded to the training and coaching, and are beginning to adopt a wider variety of approaches to improve their teaching. The coaching has had more impact higher up the school than lower down, where inconsistency in the quality of teaching remains. A considerable amount of support has been directed towards provision in the Reception class. This has had limited impact.