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17 January 2014

Mrs Sarah Murphy-Dutton  
Headteacher  
St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School  
Wexham Road  
Slough  
SL2 5QR

Dear Mrs Murphy-Dutton

**Special measures monitoring inspection of St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit with Melvyn Blackband, additional inspector, to your school on 14 and 15 January 2014, 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 March 2013. 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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2013.**

- Increase the amount of good or better teaching and eliminate inadequate teaching by ensuring that teachers:
  - provide clear guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve
  - expect more of pupils, especially the more able, for example through probing questions
  - give pupils work that is well matched to their ability
  - observe and learn from the good practice that exists in some classes and in other schools
  - use time effectively in all lessons to allow pupils to apply the skills they have been taught.
- Improve progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
  - there are frequent opportunities for pupils to write at greater length and improve their writing skills across a range of subjects
  - pupils use and apply their mathematics skills solving day-to-day problems
  - leaders keep a close check on pupils' progress and take action where there are gaps between the progress of different groups of pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - fully implementing an improvement plan that focuses sharply on improving teaching and achievement and clearly identifies measures of success
  - ensuring performance management is used effectively to bring about improvements in teaching
  - providing an effective whole-school approach to checking teaching and learning and making sure all school leaders have the necessary skills to do this
  - ensuring all senior leaders contribute effectively to achieving improvements.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 14–15 January 2014**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, the senior teacher for the Early Years Foundation Stage, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), several representatives from the local authority and a representative of Northampton Diocese. Inspectors talked to teachers while giving feedback on lesson observations and to parents informally at the end of the school day.

### **Context**

A new headteacher started in September, along with three new assistant headteachers. Two of these are external appointments and one is an internal promotion. Two teachers have left the school and one is currently absent from school.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

Last year's Year 6 pupils underachieved, particularly in mathematics. Results in the Key Stage 2 tests were below floor standards; the minimum standard for progress and attainment set by the government. Year 2 pupils fared better and reached broadly average standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Just over 60% of pupils in last year's Year 1 reached the expected level in their phonics screening check. Worryingly, no children known to be eligible for free school meals reached this expected standard by the end of Year 1.

Pupils in most year groups are now doing better than in the past. One exception to this is Year 3, where pupils are not making sufficient progress. The current Year 6 pupils are in a stronger position than last year's cohort with the school set to exceed floor standards this year.

Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate. Children get off to a good start in Nursery, where they are engaged in activities that help develop language skills and spark their curiosity. However, by the time they reach Reception, too many children spend too much time drifting around or sitting in poorly taught group sessions. Adults do not interject sufficiently to ensure there is proper purpose to children's activity and play. As a result they are making inadequate progress towards their early learning goals and are not in a strong position to enter Year 1 adequately prepared.

## **The quality of teaching**

The quality of teaching overall is improving although there remain some weaknesses in some year groups. The school is using new performance management systems to ensure that clear targets, with support, are being used to hold teachers to account. Remaining weaknesses at a leadership level mean that this is having a mixed effect, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Where teaching is strongest, pupils are making rapid progress from their different starting points. In these lessons, pupils work hard and different adults provide support and challenge to groups and individuals so they think deeply and produce good quality work. There are many more opportunities to write across different subjects and the quality of work in books is improving.

In some lessons, progress is slower because teachers stick too rigorously to the teaching strategies or schemes that have been recently adopted by the school. While these strategies and schemes have their place, they are at times overused. It is important that teachers always think carefully about why they teach in particular ways rather than pedantically following a prescribed scheme or method despite the needs of their class.

Teachers are improving the way they teach mathematics so that many pupils are able to work more successfully using known number facts and mental strategies. In the best lessons, pupils are able to explain their mathematical thinking with increasing clarity. However, some teachers are not giving enough thought to how pupils' current learning will help them understand more difficult work in the future. In these lessons, teaching is too focused on helping pupils learning tricks or methods to get the right answers without ensuring they understand the mathematical concept behind the problem.

Teaching in the Reception class is weak with adults too often having little impact on the learning taking place. The environment is uninviting and little is done to ensure that activities are purposeful. As a result some children wander from task to task without purposefully engaging. Not enough is done to ensure children are taught the skills they need. The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is weak and children often struggle with inappropriate work.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Pupils' behaviour is generally positive in class and around school. The exception to this is in the Reception class where some children play inappropriately and adults are slow to teach them the correct way to play with each other and use equipment correctly. This is in contrast to the rest of the school, including the Nursery, where expectations of conduct are higher and pupils learn to be respectful of each other and equipment.

Pupils say they enjoy school and they are positive about their work. Attendance is above average and pupils generally arrive punctually. Pupils are usually respectful towards their teachers and adults in the school. They generally work hard in lessons and, where teaching is good, need little reminding to do this even when they are not working directly with a teacher.

The school has appropriate systems in place to keep children safe. The large site is well managed so that children are secure during the day. Documents for safeguarding are up to date and show that the appropriate checks have taken place.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

There is little doubt that leadership has been strengthened by the appointment of the headteacher and three new assistant headteachers. Each of these leaders is clear about their responsibilities and can point to tangible examples of where they have taken a lead and improved practice. They have a shared understanding of what needs to be improved further and they have credible plans for making such improvements. The headteacher has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is rightly impatient and relentless in her drive for improvements.

The deputy headteacher has been tasked with dealing with the inadequacies in the Reception class. Her work here is recent but without focus on what needs to improve. The deputy headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader are not able to convincingly articulate the failings that exist in this part of the school; nor are they able to identify what will drive the urgent necessary improvements. This is despite the considerable support and challenge provided by two local authority advisors. The local authority is concerned about the progress being made in this part of the school and reports that there is little to show that the small improvements that are made immediately after their visits are sufficiently maintained or built upon. This leadership is weak and is not demonstrating any capacity to drive the considerable improvements needed here. Reports given to the IEB by the Early Years leader show a considerable over-optimism and overgenerous view of the quality of provision and a limited understanding of the needs of different groups of children.

The IEB is a credible body with a considerable amount of expertise. It is committed to improving the school and it is demanding of leaders when it perceives missed opportunities to improve the school more rapidly. It has taken some decisive action to overcome inadequacies but it has been slow to deal with the weaknesses that it has itself identified in the Reception class. It is essential that no time is lost in improving this provision while maintaining the momentum in improving the other remaining weak areas in the school.

## **External support**

In Key Stages 1 and 2, the local authority has provided a range of support and intervention which has been successful in improving much of the teaching and holding teachers to account who have not met the expected standards.

Intensive support in Reception has had limited impact. It is important that this ongoing support is paired with uncompromising challenge and a heightened expectation of leaders in this part of the school so that they quickly and convincingly develop the necessary capacity to maintain and accelerate improvements.

### **As a matter of urgency the school should:**

- Improve the quality of teaching and leadership in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that the quality of learning in Reception ensures that children are well prepared for Year 1.