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Mrs Elizabeth Williams
Executive headteacher
St Edward's Catholic Primary School
New Road
Sheerness
Kent
ME12 1BW

Dear Mrs Williams

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Edward's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 and 12 November 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 fourth 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 not making enough 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 Corporate Director of Education, Learning and Skills for Kent, and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Krafft
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement by making sure that:
 - teachers expect pupils to take a more active role in their learning and complete more work
 - teachers make sure that all pupils understand how to improve their work and have time to respond to the comments teachers write in marking
 - teachers give pupils work that builds on what they can already do, especially for more-able pupils
 - teachers learn from the outstanding practice that exists within the federation and local network of schools.
- Improve learning in the Reception class by making sure that:
 - children have more opportunities to be independent and learn by choosing their own activities
 - activities set out for children to choose from are carefully planned to target specific learning needs.
- Improve the quality of leadership by making sure that:
 - where teaching is less than good, teachers are given effective guidance and short-term targets to aim for that improve their performance rapidly
 - subject leaders and other leaders keep a close check on teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
 - the school improvement plan gives details about what should be achieved at interim stages, and these are checked to see whether everything is improving quickly enough
 - leaders evaluate how well the spending on additional help for pupils is working
 - senior leaders look for patterns in pupils' behaviour to ensure that they identify how it can be improved.
- Improve the governance of the school by:
 - developing the skills of the governing body, especially their understanding of information from tests and assessments in relation to other schools nationally
 - ensuring that governors have all the information required to help them challenge the school's leaders more effectively.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 11 and 12 November 2014

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, two governors, two representatives from the local authority and a representative from the diocese. Teaching and learning were observed in every class with either the executive headteacher or the head of school. Extra support being given to a small group of pupils was also observed. A sample of pupils' books was looked at. The school's checks to safeguard pupils were viewed. Behaviour and safety did not form part of this monitoring inspection because they were judged to be better than other aspects of the school's work at the last section 5 inspection.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection there have been significant changes to the school's teaching staff, leadership and governance. Six of the seven teachers are new. Currently one teacher is on sick leave and the class is being taught by a supply teacher. Further changes will take place at the end of term. The previous executive headteacher, head of school and pastoral support worker left at the end of the academic year. In September a new executive headteacher was appointed to lead the school for three days a week for one year. At the same time, a local assistant headteacher was appointed to be the full-time head of school for one year. A new pastoral support worker has recently joined the staff. A new governing body was formed in April. Most of the vacancies on the governing body have very recently been filled. The clerk to the governing body and the local authority school improvement adviser were new in September. Plans for the school to convert to an academy have been delayed twice.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although there have been some improvements, the achievement of pupils is too variable and not improving quickly across the school. Standards rose at the end of Year 6 in 2014 but remain low, particularly in grammar, punctuation and spelling and for pupils with special educational needs. Fewer pupils than nationally attained the highest levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Standards rose because Year 6 pupils made better progress than previously. However, they did not make sufficient progress to catch up enough ground lost over time. The gaps in attainment between pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and other pupils in the school are not closing enough. The gap widened in writing.

In the summer, the proportion of children at the end of Reception with a good level of development increased. The proportion of Year 1 pupils who reached the expected standards in the reading checks improved significantly on the previous year but remained below average. However, less than half of those pupils who had fallen

behind in their reading skills the previous year caught up by the end of Year 2. This puts them at a significant disadvantage now that they are in Year 3. Standards in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 fell in 2014.

The quality of learning and progress is currently too variable in different classes and subjects because there is not enough consistently good teaching. Pupils continue to make better progress in Years 5 and 6, where teaching is stronger than elsewhere in the school. However, some improvements seen at the last monitoring inspection have not been sustained, particularly in Reception. This is a serious concern. The momentum for pupils to complete more work has not been maintained in all classes and weaknesses remain in pupils' handwriting, punctuation, grammar and spelling.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is too variable and not good enough to raise standards and ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can. There are pockets of inadequate teaching which hinder pupils' progress. Efforts to improve classroom practice have been hampered considerably by continuous changes of staff. Some teachers who had been given training, support and opportunities to observe good teaching in other schools have since left. Others who have joined need the same guidance and support to improve their practice.

Expectations of pupils, particularly the youngest, are not high enough. Often work is not set at the right level so some pupils find it too difficult and others are not sufficiently challenged to learn well. Teachers do not all have a clear understanding of what pupils already know and what they need to learn next. Pupils of widely varied abilities are sometimes given the same work to do and are expected to work at the same pace through tasks, despite their different levels of understanding. As a result, their learning slows, particularly the more able. When pupils are given tasks with insufficient or protracted explanations they become confused, distracted or lose concentration and so learn little.

Older pupils make better progress because gaps in their knowledge are recognised and their skills are built step by step. They overcome misconceptions and gain confidence because they are given relevant, tailored work. They are supported effectively by well-informed and vigilant adults. However, this is not evident across the school. Too often adults do not check what pupils are learning, spot errors and move pupils on when they are ready in order to develop their understanding further. As a consequence, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

With the arrival of so many new staff there are now different approaches being used across the school to teach reading, which is unhelpful. When teaching early reading skills, some adults do not check carefully that children are making the correct sounds for letters, nor do they demonstrate accurately how it should be done. Some adults do not use correct grammar when speaking to pupils and some worksheets that pupils are given have punctuation errors, which is unacceptable.

When activities are not carefully planned, quality learning time is lost. In Reception and Year 1, pupils became restless waiting for activities to be set up or because they were unsure what they had to do. Their behaviour was not managed consistently and other pupils were distracted as a result.

Pupils' work is generally marked regularly. There are some examples of helpful comments and pupils respond to these. However, poor presentation, incorrect letter and number formation, spelling errors and punctuation mistakes are not consistently corrected so pupils form bad writing habits which are difficult to break as they get older.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the school has changed completely since the last monitoring inspection but current leaders still face the same issues. Recruiting good-quality, permanent teachers remains a key concern. Without stability the leaders' efforts to sustain improvements in teaching through training, support and professional development are being thwarted. Training and regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning have been continuous. However, teachers have not stayed at the school long enough for pupils to benefit fully, and some appointments have not been strong. There is still a reliance on high levels of support to improve teaching.

The transition to new leadership arrangements was not managed effectively. Necessary information was not readily available for new leaders to have a full and accurate picture of the school from the moment they took over. Consequently, the pace of improvement has lacked the urgency needed. Although leaders have checked the quality of teaching currently in the school, actions to tackle any that is not as good as it should be, or improving quickly, have not been incisive. Targets have not been set to manage performance, make expectations clear and hold staff to account for improving teaching and learning.

Information about how pupil premium funding is spent and the difference that it is making for eligible pupils is not readily available for parents, governors or current leaders, as required. Leaders are therefore unclear what is working well and what is not effectively closing gaps in attainment.

There have been changes to middle leadership. A new mathematics leader took up post recently and the previous leader has assumed responsibility for English. These changes are too recent for them to demonstrate their contribution to improving teaching and learning across the school. There are further changes to middle leadership ahead which will need to be managed carefully if improvements in English and mathematics are going to be made.

Governance arrangements have changed for the third time since the school was made subject to special measures. As a consequence of all the changes, the school has so far not been held accountable robustly enough for the pace of improvement. The new governing body is inexperienced but committed to improving the school. Governors know the community well. They have quickly undertaken relevant training to develop their understanding of data and their roles and responsibilities. They visit the school and are beginning to ask the right questions of leaders. They understand that they have more to learn for governance to be as effective as it needs to be.

Current leaders have worked hard to communicate their commitment to the school and gain the confidence of parents and staff. However, the continuous recruitment and retention difficulties that the school has faced mean that it is unable to demonstrate the capacity for sustained improvement. Arrangements to recruit a permanent headteacher are just beginning.

External support

The diocese and local authority worked together to secure the current leadership arrangements. They have given the school relevant support to improve teaching and learning. Their work has made little sustained difference because of the high staff turnover. They are rightly concerned about the impact these constant changes are having on continuity, the sustainability of the school's improvement and its lack of progress. The school leaders, governors, local authority and diocese need to take urgent action and put in place a robust strategy that will get the school back on track.

Links with the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership have been maintained. The date for the school to join the partnership as an academy has been moved back twice. This has contributed to some uncertainty for the local authority about how to best manage the transition arrangements.