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Mrs Leanne Brydon
Headteacher
St Brendan's Catholic Primary School
Beanfield Avenue
Corby
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Dear Mrs Brydon

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

Following my visit to your school on 4–5 February 2015, 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 third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in March 2014. 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 appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection, provided that a comprehensive plan is in place, with mentoring from a member of the senior leadership team.

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 and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Julia Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - providing training and support, in partnership with the local teaching school and other providers, to model the expectations of good or better teaching
 - checking that pupils respond appropriately to the written comments made on their work so that they are ready to move on in their learning
 - making sure that assessment information and checks on pupils' progress are used to set challenging work for pupils, in particular the most able, so they make faster progress.

- Raise achievement by the end of Key Stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that checks on pupils' progress are accurate
 - making sure that the work set is hard enough for the most-able pupils so that more of them achieve the higher levels
 - checking the consistency and impact of the support pupils receive, particularly disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, so that all of them make at least good progress.

- Strengthen leadership and management at all levels and build the capacity of the school to improve by providing a programme of coaching and mentoring for senior and other leaders so that they acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding to:
 - check the quality of teaching
 - develop and use effectively systems to measure the progress of different groups
 - create and implement improvement plans, especially for English and mathematics, that set clear targets for improvement, show how actions will be monitored and evaluated and identify who will check their success
 - set performance targets for teachers that are closely linked to pupils' achievement.

- Increasing governors' understanding of, and involvement in, checking and challenging the school's performance to give them a realistic view of the school's effectiveness so that they can hold the school's leaders rigorously to account.

An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 4-5 February 2015

Evidence

The lead inspector scrutinised documents including: the school improvement plan; school information about pupils' predicted achievement in 2015; minutes of the governing body's meetings; the external review of governance; the joint monitoring report from the local authority; and a sample of pupils' books in English and mathematics. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the senior local authority improvement officer and three members of the governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector also interviewed a group of six pupils and spoke informally with parents as they dropped off their children. She observed pupils' learning in nine parts of lessons, four of which were seen jointly with the headteacher. The lead inspector considered the progress made in addressing the key recommendations that were identified in the previous inspection report, with the exception of those relating to improvement plans, which were checked during the previous monitoring visit.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, a new substantive deputy headteacher has been appointed from existing staff. The literacy leader has left the school; her role has been filled from an existing member of staff. There are four temporary teachers in Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. One governor has resigned and not been replaced. The first phase of building work, in the Early Years Foundation Stage, has neared completion. The additional Year 1 classroom will be completed at Easter.

Achievement of pupils at the school

In 2014, Year 6 pupils, including the most able, made less progress than they should have done in reading and writing, and especially in mathematics. Groups of children, particularly girls, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, achieved less well than they should have done. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils improved, although, at the end of Year 6, they were one term behind their peers in mathematics. Data, provided by the school, show that outcomes are expected to be closer to national expectations in 2015. However, achievement in mathematics remains a concern and pupils in Year 4 are still not catching up quickly enough from previous years' underachievement.

Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not achieve as well as they should; their learning and development are too slow. In 2014, only half the children achieved a good level of development. In the same year, not enough pupils achieved expected standards in phonics at the end of Year 1. In September, leaders trained

all teachers to teach phonics. Pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 then had the opportunity to attend daily sessions and this has helped them to reach the required standard.

Leaders have ensured that their systems for assessing pupils' progress are increasingly accurate. The local authority has provided effective external support in ensuring the accuracy of teachers' assessment of writing. In addition, teachers attend regular 'phase meetings', chaired by a senior leader, where they are required to provide evidence to support their assessments. Each teacher completes assessments of their pupils every six weeks, and then they attend a progress meeting with the headteacher and her deputy. At these meetings, teachers are required to discuss individual pupils who are underachieving, including the disadvantaged, girls and those who are disabled or have special educational needs. Teachers put appropriate support in place for pupils who need it, and the effectiveness of this support is discussed at subsequent meetings. The headteacher and other staff hold after-school sessions to support children to achieve their potential. This includes a girls-only mathematics session for Years 5 and 6, to help them develop their confidence in this subject. It is too early to see if this is making a difference to girls' achievement.

The inspector noted that work in pupils' English books, in Year 6, shows that pupils, particularly the most able, are not being stretched enough to achieve Level 5. The work in pupils' mathematics books does not always show logical progression in their learning, nor sufficient challenge for the most able. Teachers do not always correct pupils' spelling mistakes. This hinders pupils' progress in their communication skills.

The quality of teaching

The recent turnover of staff initially had an adverse effect on the overall quality of teaching. However, temporary teachers are committed and have adapted well to the school's strict requirements for planning, marking and monitoring the progress of pupils.

The quality of marking is improving still further, but variability remains between subjects and teachers. Teachers in Key Stage 2 use tabs to indicate to pupils where they need to respond to teachers' comments and carry out additional work. The teacher then checks pupils' responses and pupils develop their understanding further. Pupils' presentation of their work has improved and teachers challenge the very rare cases of graffiti. Teachers' feedback is occasionally too complex for the least able pupils and does not provide them with helpful advice to move on in their learning. In other examples, teachers give the most able highly positive feedback, but very little additional challenge. In some mathematics books, incorrect work was marked as excellent.

School leaders have ensured that there is far greater consistency in teaching across the school. They insist that teachers use a common method for planning lessons in

English and mathematics. Teachers use assessment information about their pupils to help them plan more effectively. Teachers work in threes to share best practice, and this has resulted in a shared approach to presenting learning intentions to pupils. As a result, pupils understand what they must achieve in order to be successful. Pupils' opinions are collected regularly and their feedback has resulted in changes to the way they work in lessons. Pupils say that when teachers use 'focus, think or talk' time in lessons, it helps them to know when they must focus on their work, and it gives them other opportunities to 'develop confidence and learn from each other'. Both parents and pupils say that homework is more frequent and they appreciate the use of 'daily expectations' of homework and the opportunities for pupils to undertake weekly creative homework. The quality of support provided by teaching assistants is variable. Class teachers make sure that their teaching assistants are aware of what their role is in the lesson. Some teaching assistants provide highly effective support, particularly for pupils who speak English as an additional language, who make rapid progress as a result. Teaching assistants are less effective when they do too much work for the children, as this does not help them to learn things for themselves.

In mathematics, teachers provide pupils with methods to help them carry out calculations, but they do not always provide opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding or apply their learning in different situations. Pupils have a number of gaps in their mathematical knowledge because of previously poor teaching. On occasion, teachers still teach incorrect methods and this reinforces pupils' misconceptions. School leaders have provided recent training on effective mathematics teaching, but this is not making a difference. However, training on the use of appropriate mathematical resources has resulted in pupils having access to a greater range of resources to help them learn.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not make sufficient progress. This is a result of poor planning, which does not lead to learning for all children. As a result, children carry out activities with no learning purpose. They are not sure what teachers expect of them because teachers have not established basic routines. For example, children lack clarity about expectations for hand washing prior to eating and do not respond immediately to teachers' instructions.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils behave well around the school site and are polite to visitors. They report that bullying is rare and are confident that the teachers would deal with any incidents effectively. They are well-informed about the different types of prejudice-based bullying including homophobic- cyber- and racist-bullying. Pupils are clear that in their school community you treat everyone with respect, and do not hurt people's feelings. Pupils say that they feel safe. The single central record meets statutory requirements.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The recently-appointed headteacher has quickly gained a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school rapidly. She is highly resilient and not afraid to confront issues, including taking decisive action to eradicate inadequate teaching. She has re-instilled the school's values and put the children back at the centre of everything that the school does.

Improvement of the school is too dependent on the leadership of the headteacher. Not all leaders, some of whom are new to post, have developed sufficient skills to carry out their roles effectively. The leadership of special educational needs and the Early Years Foundation Stage is not as effective as it could be. The special educational needs co-ordinator has led staff training about the new code of practice. She has had limited impact on the quality of support given by teaching assistants. The new deputy headteacher has an accurate view of the quality of teaching, including strengths and weaknesses. Her monitoring activities include pupil voice, data on pupils' progress and scrutiny of teachers' marking. School leaders have planned a number of opportunities to develop staff, including a session next term on supporting children who speak English as an additional language. Teachers' performance management objectives are highly personalised, and relate closely to the stage that they are at in their careers. Leaders have established effective systems to measure the progress that different groups of pupils make. Teachers are required to meet challenging targets related to this progress.

The Chair of the Governing Body knows the school well and is aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors recognise the importance of spending the pupil premium funding effectively, but acknowledge that the achievement of these pupils varies. A sub-committee of the governing body is responsible for monitoring the impact of actions on the school improvement plan and holding school leaders to account. The chair is sensibly leading a re-constitution of the governing body to enable it to carry out its duties more efficiently. An external review of governance has taken place. Governors have found this helpful in suggesting improvements to their practice. Governors are currently in discussions regarding the conversion of the school to an academy.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective external support. The senior local authority improvement officer knows the school well and her last review accurately summarises the school's progress towards the removal of special measures. She has arranged appropriate shadowing opportunities at other nearby schools, including the local outstanding school. She is providing additional support for the Early Years Foundation Stage leader.

The commissioned headteacher continues to spend one day a week at the school. She has reduced her support to the headteacher, rightly acknowledging her growing capacity to lead the school unaided, during the journey through special measures. She has sensibly moved her support to developing other leaders in the school.

The headteacher is ensuring that she takes opportunities to work collaboratively within the cluster of Catholic schools to share best practice and provide opportunities for teachers to participate in network and moderation meetings.

The school should take further action to:

- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enable all children to develop as quickly as they should.