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Mrs M Buller
The Executive Headteacher
St Anne's Catholic Primary School
Washington Road
Caversham
Reading
RG4 5AA

Dear Mrs Buller

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

Following my visit with to your school on 11 and 12 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose, but would benefit from more precise actions, tighter timescales and clearer benchmarks to measure the success of the actions.

The school improvement plan is fit for purpose. It would benefit from more specific actions to make sure the school achieves the desired improvements as quickly as possible and ensures that the success of the actions can be easily measured.

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 Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Reading and the Director of the Diocesan Education Service in the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have the skills to accurately assess pupils' attainment
 - raising expectations about what all pupils, particularly those who are more able, can achieve and set tasks appropriate for their needs
 - ensuring the pace of learning in all lessons is appropriate to ensure good progress for all pupils
 - ensuring that teaching, together with additional support, enables those with special educational need to make good progress.
- Raise achievement in writing by:
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length across the curriculum
 - ensuring the writing policy is consistently applied in all classes.
- Improve leadership and management, including governance, to secure and sustain improvements by ensuring that:
 - procedures relating to safeguarding are urgently, consistently implemented
 - there is clear succession planning for the senior leadership of the school
 - weaknesses in teaching are eliminated rapidly, performance management is linked to achievement and checks made on the quality of teaching are robust
 - staff are given opportunities to develop their skills through a planned programme of professional development
 - rapid action is taken to monitor the progress of those who are eligible for the pupil premium to ensure that gaps are closing
 - the leadership of special educational needs is developed within the school
 - the governing body robustly holds the school to account and ensures financial probity.

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 February 2015

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with a group of pupils, the executive headteacher, the two assistant headteachers, the English and mathematics subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the pupil premium (additional government funds for pupils in receipt of free school meals or in local authority care) coordinator, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and another member the IEB, and a representative of the local authority.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, one full-time and one part-time teacher have left the school. Currently, the Year 4 and Year 5 classes are being taught by long-term supply teachers. The current Year 2 teacher moved from Year 5 to teach this class from January 2015.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' progress continues to be variable across the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This is also the case for different groups of pupils. The school has a wide range of information on pupils' achievement and is using this information to track the progress of all groups of pupils in all classes. However, there are still concerns about the accuracy of some of this information. It is vitally important that senior leaders regularly check the validity of assessments to ensure that the information they gather about pupils' learning is accurate.

The school is using the additional government funding to support vulnerable pupils through specific group and individual learning programmes, which are showing some success. The gaps in the achievement of some of these pupils are beginning to narrow compared to all other pupils in the school.

Pupils have more opportunities to write at length. The new curriculum, which was introduced by senior leaders in January 2015, is providing a wider range of opportunities to write in other subjects. Pupils are more enthusiastic about their writing. This was evident in the Year 6 class, where pupils were writing about the Black Death as part of the history topic in their 'Peasants, Princes and Pestilence' theme.

The quality of pupils' handwriting is improving because senior leaders expect pupils to regularly practise their handwriting and develop a consistent cursive style. However, it is evident that some classes are not applying the new handwriting policy well enough. Expectations of pupils' presentation and spelling have been made clear but, again, the presentation and spelling in some pupils' work are still not good enough.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is not improving as quickly as it should. Although there is evidence in some classes that pupils are making better progress, in most lessons, and over time, pupils' progress is not rapid enough. Weaknesses in teaching remain. In some classes pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils. Teachers are planning different activities for the varied abilities of pupils in their class. However, planning sometimes concentrates predominantly on the task or activity to be completed. Teachers do not always focus on the learning that is expected to take place in the lesson. There are still groups of pupils across the school who are underachieving because not all teachers are skilled enough at identifying the quality of pupils' learning in lessons. As a result, they do not adjust tasks and challenge pupils' thinking through effective questioning.

There are gaps in some pupils' knowledge and understanding, particularly in mathematics and in phonics (the sounds letters make). At present, teachers do not know precisely what these gaps are. They have not thoroughly checked what pupils already know, or what they have been taught but have not understood. Consequently, lessons are not planned to address misconceptions and close gaps in pupils' understanding.

The newly devised English policy has been agreed by teachers but, as yet, not all aspects of the policy are being applied by all staff. This is also the case with the marking policy. Many teachers are providing useful feedback to pupils, but improvements in pupils' work are not always evident. This is sometime because pupils are not given sufficient time to improve their work. Sometimes it is because the feedback is not precise enough for pupils to know what they need to do to show how their work can be even better. Teaching assistants are supporting pupils' learning in lessons well. This enables pupils who find learning difficult to make better progress.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around school is generally calm and focused on learning. Relationships between pupils are mainly supportive. There are some pupils who find concentration in lessons challenging. At times their behaviour deteriorates when the content of the lesson is not matched well enough to their learning needs or when teachers' expectations of their behaviour are not high enough. Pupils are enthusiastic about the new curriculum and say that the new approach to learning through themes across different subjects is helping them to learn interesting and useful facts and information.

Pupils are happy to come to school, although absence rates have risen this year. This is a cause for concern, particularly for pupils at risk of not doing so well. They are missing vital learning time because they are not in school.

Pupils are positive that they feel safe in school because, as one pupil reflected, 'teachers give us a sense of safety'. They know that they are well looked after and are learning about how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are positive that incidents of bullying are rare. They know that teachers take notice and act to reduce inappropriate behaviour. However, younger pupils do not have such a strong understanding of different types of bullying or how to deal with it, should it arise.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The leadership of the school is now more stable. The momentum for improvement has increased since the previous monitoring visit. However, although fundamental improvements are emerging, new systems and initiatives are at an early stage of development and are not embedded. So far, there is insufficient impact of the new initiatives.

Some positive effects of the school's work are beginning to emerge. Staff are committed to improve learning for all pupils. There is a more positive and supportive atmosphere within the school. Teachers are eager to improve their practice and welcome feedback and guidance. Although the executive headteacher has acted decisively to reduce the proportion of poor quality teaching, there is more to be done to eradicate it completely. Planned improvements and staff training are also at an early stage and have yet to secure consistently strong teaching across the school. School leaders check the quality of teaching regularly and provide helpful feedback to teachers. However, they are not following up on weaker aspects of teaching well enough to ensure that weaknesses are eliminated quickly.

Staff changes have been necessary but the instability of staffing has created many challenges for the school. Planning to achieve the future stability of the school is in place. However, the school has yet to secure a full complement of permanent, high quality teachers. This is a key priority to ensure the drive for rapid improvement is realised.

The special educational needs coordinator continues to check on the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. She has a good understanding of the progress they are making and checks on the quality of the support programmes, adjusting provision where necessary, to ensure that the progress of these pupils accelerates.

Senior leaders meet regularly with teachers to discuss the progress pupils are making. However, the precise impact of these meetings is unclear. The meetings would benefit from clear information on the underperformance of individual pupils, the strategies planned to help them catch up, and whether these have been successful.

Members of the IEB thoroughly check on the work of the school. They have been given helpful information about teachers' performance to enable them to make

effective decisions about teachers' pay progression. They have acted decisively to improve the financial position of the school and are scrupulous about checking that the government funding for vulnerable pupils is used effectively. Steps are being taken to reduce the size of the deficit in the school budget. The local authority continues to support the school financially. The school's safeguarding arrangements are checked carefully by the IEB. Safeguarding policies have been reviewed and amended to reflect current guidelines and statutory duties. Almost all required policies and procedures are now in place.

The planned meeting for parents to keep them informed about the progress of the school was postponed due to adverse weather conditions. Plans are underway to reschedule this meeting. Steps to establish a shadow governing body are also underway. Parents have been invited to make expressions of interest in becoming a parent governor when the shadow governing body is established.

External support

The school is heavily dependent on external support from the local authority, which is targeted to specific areas such as writing, phonics, mathematics, teaching and learning and checking the accuracy of assessments. However, the impact of this support is not always clear. Notes of visits, review meeting reports and progress monitoring reports have not been shared with the school in a timely fashion, thus reducing the opportunity to capitalise on the input that has taken place. Sharper, more focused plans to drive improvement are required to ensure the school is in a stronger position to rapidly improve.