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Mrs Janet Tuck
Headteacher
St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School
High Street
Newport
PO30 1NR

Dear Mrs Tuck

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection, a teacher has been appointed to lead the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

All discussions with leaders and governors give the clear impression of a school that has moved forward since its section 5 inspection. Although the judgement came as a shock to leaders and staff, you and the Chair of the Governing Body have steered

everyone's energy towards improving the school as quickly as possible. You set up a parents' meeting soon after the report was published to explain the school's position and the support it is receiving. You have put appropriate steps in place to keep parents and carers in touch with the school's progress. You have rightly focused on improving the way teachers plan their lessons and now check individual pupils' progress with each teacher more frequently. The special educational needs manager has reviewed teaching assistants' skills to determine how the provision for these pupils can be improved. All these are appropriate steps at this early stage in the school's improvement.

Representatives from the local authority acted promptly to set up the two required reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils). The governance review has sharpened governors' awareness of their role in providing a healthy degree of challenge for the school's leaders. This is paramount in a school that requires special measures. Governors have a key responsibility to check that the school is up to speed with its planned actions and that the school is moving in the right direction. The Chair of the Governing Body is working closely with the local authority's governor services and plans are well underway for drawing up a separate action plan for governors. The report from the pupil premium review has only very recently been received and governors have not yet met to discuss and respond to its findings.

The local authority's statement of action includes all aspects that it should to meet the statutory requirements. It outlines appropriate support for the school, much of it directed towards improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. The training and support are targeted and aligned to the areas the school must improve from the section 5 inspection. The local authority's actions are clear for developing the skills and impact of middle leaders. However, the plan is less specific about how senior leaders will be supported to make sure their evaluation of the school's work is realistic and accurate. This was found to be a weakness at the section 5 inspection. It is important that the local authority and governors assure themselves that senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching, and pupils' progress in particular, are absolutely right and rooted in secure evidence.

The school's leaders and the local authority want to see the school removed from special measures early. The school's plan for improvement does not give a clear enough steer to show how rapid improvement will be achieved. It needs refining, refocusing and pruning. Many of the actions are worded in a general way and it is not clear how they will eradicate the school's weaknesses. It is important, as an early step, to diagnose exactly where the weaknesses in pupils' progress lie: which years and groups, for example. In this way, leaders can pinpoint the priorities that need particular and early focus to accelerate pupils' achievement quickly. The plan does not have clear targets and milestones to show what will be expected by when.

It is therefore difficult for those monitoring the school's progress, including governors, to check that the actions are working, that weaker areas are being targeted successfully and that the school is on track to be removed from special measures within the desired timescale.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

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

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's raising achievement plan is not fit for purpose.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector