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30 April 2015

Virginia Fraher
St Mary's RC Primary School
Canterbury Road
London
NW6 5ST

Dear Ms Fraher

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's RC Primary School

Following my visit with Fatiha Maitland, Additional inspector, to your school on 28–29 April 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 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 Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Brent.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Loukes
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2015

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good so that standards, especially in writing and mathematics across the school, rise by ensuring that:
 - teachers assess work accurately, especially in writing, and use this information to set work at the right level for pupils of different abilities, so that tasks build on what they know already
 - teachers always provide pupils with clear guidance in their marking so that pupils know how they can improve their learning
 - pupils are provided with regular opportunities to respond to comments in marked work
 - additional adults have the necessary skills to support pupils effectively in their learning and to help manage their behaviour in lessons.

- Improve rapidly the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - leaders hold staff robustly to account to raise expectations for pupils' progress
 - regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement lead to quick action to improve teaching and achievement
 - information about pupils' progress is used effectively by leaders to identify gaps in learning for individuals and groups of pupils, and to put the right support in place so that all pupils make good progress
 - the success of actions to improve pupils' learning is evaluated, including for those with a statement of special educational needs
 - targets for staff performance are sufficiently challenging and are regularly reviewed so that staff know how to improve
 - an analysis of incidents of poor behaviour is undertaken to identify trends and patterns so that appropriate actions can be put in place to improve behaviour.

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

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 28–29 April 2015

Evidence

Inspectors made short visits to classrooms accompanied by the interim headteacher and deputy headteacher. Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, two parents or carers, the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority adviser linked to the school. A telephone discussion was also held with the senior local authority officer who chairs the Rapid Improvement Group (RIG). Inspectors spoke with a group of pupils formally, as well as at break and lunchtimes, and during visits to classrooms. Documents relating to staff recruitment and pupils' achievement were reviewed, as were minutes of governing body meetings and those of the RIG. A selection of pupils' work in a range of subjects was scrutinised jointly with the deputy headteacher.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, two teachers have left the school. One vacancy is being covered by a supply teacher, the other by the interim deputy headteacher. Staff from the diocese are assisting leaders with the internal recruitment of a subject leader for religious education. A middle leader with responsibility for lower Key Stage 2 has recently been appointed. Attempts to recruit a permanent headteacher have been unsuccessful.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's tracking information suggests that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development this year will be above the 2014 national average, and higher than that achieved last year. A higher proportion of pupils than last year is predicted to reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check. School data suggests that Year 6 pupils' attainment will be broadly in line with national averages, as will the proportion making expected progress. However, the proportion predicted to exceed the amount of progress expected will be significantly lower than the national average in writing and mathematics. Disadvantaged pupils throughout the school are achieving at a similar level to other pupils.

The quality of teaching

The effective aspects of teaching are now more consistently applied throughout the school. Although a few examples of weak practice remain, the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils has improved significantly. The 'green pen questions' that teachers pose when marking pupils' work are now of higher quality; they are used effectively to give teachers a clearer picture of pupils' understanding or to present pupils with further challenge. The strongest practice sees teachers following up pupils' responses to ensure that learning is secure. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have been raised. The recently introduced handwriting policy has

resulted in a marked improvement in the presentation of pupils' work. Teachers are becoming more particular when reviewing pupils' written work. They correct grammatical and spelling errors as a matter of course. However, while the detailed aspects of pupils' writing are scrutinised closely, the overall fluency of pupils' writing does not receive sufficient attention. 'Fix it time' provides time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments at the beginning of lessons. As a result, pupils reinforce their learning before tackling a new topic. At its most effective, teaching capitalises on opportunities to link learning in different subjects. For example, a Year 3 English lesson, using fossils as a stimulus, drew on pupils' prior learning about the properties of materials. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage make the most of opportunities to reinforce phonics knowledge and early number skills.

Additional adults are most effective when they receive clear guidance from teachers about their role during lessons. Where there is clear direction and a good understanding of what is expected of them, additional adults provide effective support for pupils. However, a lack of direction sometimes leads to a poor use of their time, limiting their impact on pupils' learning. Recent training has improved teaching assistants' skills in supporting pupils in reading and mathematics. As a result of mathematics training, they make more effective use of practical resources to support learning. Training to support pupils' reading has given additional adults a more detailed understanding of the skills pupils require in order to attain different levels.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Older pupils are supportive of one another in the classroom, engaging in debate about their learning. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage develop resilience, learning to solve disputes without reliance on adult intervention. Younger pupils value the support provided by Year 6 buddies in the playground at lunchtimes. Pupils respond promptly to the whistle that indicates the end of lunchtime, making sure their uniform is appropriately adjusted before entering the building for the afternoon's lessons.

Systems to analyse patterns of pupils' behaviour are at an early stage of development. While information about behavioural incidents is now recorded in a database, it is not used effectively to inform decision making.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Attempts to recruit a substantive headteacher have been unsuccessful. The number of interim leadership posts gives rise to a feeling of uncertainty about the future leadership of the school. However, the governing body, local authority and diocese are working together closely to ensure that robust and sustainable arrangements are in place for the beginning of the next academic year.

Leaders of the provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs have established clear and robust systems for checking pupils' progress and provision in the classroom. Regular meetings with leaders and support staff ensure that staff are held accountable for ensuring that agreed actions are completed.

Leaders take a range of information into account when judging the effectiveness of teaching. This includes pupils' progress data and information collected during the observation of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work. This is leading to a more detailed and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching, and of individuals' developmental needs.

As a member of the RIG, the Chair of the Governing Body is fully aware of the school's progress and priorities. Governors visit school regularly and undertake a wide range of business which includes engaging with parents and carers and leading the headteacher recruitment process. However, the governing body does not review pupils' achievement with sufficient frequency to have an up-to-date picture of progress towards the school's academic targets.

External support

The local authority has increased the urgency of its approach to supporting and challenging the school. The RIG is now chaired by a senior local authority officer. Minutes of meetings indicate a strengthening of approach. RIG members make specific requests for information, pursuing lines of enquiry with rigour. Those involved report a more business-like and focused approach. The local authority adviser responsible for assessment has worked with the deputy headteacher to establish systems for assessing pupils' achievement in the light of the removal of National Curriculum levels. The local authority continues to fund the post of interim deputy headteacher.