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Mrs Alixena Lubomski
Executive Headteacher
St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Skipton
Gargrave Road
Skipton
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Lubomski

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Skipton

Following my visit to your school on 16 and 17 June 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 February 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 measure. 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, Leeds Catholic Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for North Yorkshire.

Yours sincerely

Gina White

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

■ Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables all pupils in all subjects, especially those in Key Stage 1, to be challenged in their learning and reach their full potential by:

- eradicating inadequate teaching
- ensuring activities are planned to sustain pupils' enthusiasm and concentration and give rise to fewer opportunities for pupils to drift off-task and misbehave
- raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially when moving from the Early Years Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1
- ensuring teachers take full account of what pupils already know and can do so that activities challenge them to reach their full potential
- adapting the school's approach to the teaching of phonics (the links between letters and sounds) so that pupils learn new sounds quickly and are given books that allow them to put into practice what they have learned
- providing high-quality professional development and training for staff on how pupils' literacy and numeracy skills develop from year-to-year and to support and develop the skills of all teachers, especially those whose practice is not yet good
- rapidly improving pupils' spelling, handwriting and the presentation of their work
- ensuring pupils can recognise good or better writing so that they are motivated and encouraged to apply the same principles in their own work
- sharing the best practice evident within the school more widely so that all teachers can learn from the best and improve their skills
- addressing the inconsistencies evident in teachers' marking and feedback so that pupils more readily address their errors and misconceptions
- ensuring that the activities children choose for themselves in the Early Years Foundation Stage are sufficiently challenging, especially for those who are most able, so that children make even more rapid progress in their learning and play.

■ Improve behaviour and attendance so that they are at least good by ensuring that:

- swift action is taken to implement the strategies and actions arising from the external review of behaviour and attendance
- senior leaders review and evaluate the impact of actions already taken to improve behaviour, and make sure that the pupils' views are listened to and considered
- all instances of reported bullying are followed up thoroughly and monitored closely to prevent them from reoccurring and to reassure pupils and parents.

■ Improve the leadership and management of the school by:

- ensuring that middle leaders clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and are able to fulfil them
- taking swift and effective action to improve the quality of information used to check pupils' progress; analysing this information rigorously to provide an accurate assessment

of the school's performance

- reporting rigorously and robustly on the progress made by different groups of pupils, including those supported by the pupil premium, and rapidly identifying individuals and groups of pupils at risk of underachievement
- monitoring the performance of teachers in accordance with the National Teachers' Standards
- checking the quality of teaching and learning more closely to ensure all staff meet the expected professional standards and are held to account for closing gaps in pupils' achievement
- analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of school initiatives and the impact of the additional support provided to individuals and groups of pupils
- ensuring governors provide robust challenge for leaders and carry out and commission their own checks rather than relying solely on the headteacher's view.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 16 and 17 June 2015

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and senior leadership team, groups of pupils, parents, and the vice-Chair of the Governing Body and governors. Telephone discussions were held with a representative from the local authority, and Leeds Catholic diocese. The inspector observed the school's work, a sample of pupils' books was reviewed and short focused visits were made to ten lessons. Records relating to the school's assessment data, governance, school planning and the monitoring of teaching, behaviour, attendance and safety were scrutinised.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, further changes have taken place at senior leadership level. The headteacher has resigned following an extended period of absence due to ill health. A deputy headteacher and a leader for the early years have been appointed from within the school. The executive headteacher, together with the newly appointed deputy headteacher, continues to lead the school. Half of the classes in Key Stage 1 and 2 are taught by temporary teachers due to vacancies and long-term staff absence. Currently 200 pupils are on roll and several pupils have left the school since the last monitoring visit. The school is due to become an academy on 1 August sponsored by The Bishop Wheeler Academy Trust.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school leaders and staff are analysing pupils' information and data more comprehensively. Improvements in pupils' progress in reading have been maintained since the previous monitoring visit. Although attainment in writing and in mathematics is improving progress remains slower than in reading in many classes. Fewer pupils in Years 2, 3 and 5 are making the progress the school expects them to and progress is not accelerating as quickly as it is in other year groups. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have disabilities and special educational needs do not achieve as well as their classmates and progress gaps remain wide across the school.

Pupils in Year 6 have made faster progress in the last 12 months in reading, writing and mathematics and attainment is rising, particularly for the most able pupils. More pupils are now working at or above the expected levels for their age.

Assessment is developing more securely in the Nursery and Reception classes and children are being prepared well for Year 1. The most able children in Reception

write well. They are learning to recognise and spell similar sounding words, such as wood and would, and know how to use them appropriately in their writing.

Pupils who enter Key Stage 2 with lower levels of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are catching up more quickly, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. This is because additional support is better targeted to help them. These pupils are making impressive gains in developing their knowledge and skills more thoroughly to read more complex texts and to recall and use number facts more securely. However, the school has yet to see that this progress is sustained when the additional support and interventions end.

The school's latest data and tracking information shows that rates of progress for the most able pupils are beginning to increase, in response to more challenge in maths lessons. However, this has yet to be sustained over time.

The quality of teaching

The quality of teaching remains variable across the school and in classes within each key stage. Changes to the way in which mathematics is taught, and recent training, has helped to develop teachers' skills and confidence in teaching the subject. This has led, in some classes, to better planning of tasks and activities to deepen pupils' knowledge and extend their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills. Greater use of mathematical equipment and strategies are helping to support pupils' understanding and confidence in calculating percentages and fractions. In Key Stage 2 emphasis is being given in lessons to pupils explaining their thinking, and in checking their calculations, and they are developing the confidence to do so more assuredly.

Teaching assistants are used well in some classes to enable pupils to understand how to work out word problems. Their explanations to individuals and small groups help to reinforce the teacher's earlier demonstration. Several pupils said they did not always understand word problems in mathematics first time and the additional explanations helped enormously to enable them to grasp concepts. However, this is not the case in all classes and some pupils are not helped to learn or to be independent, because tasks do not build well enough on what has gone before and they become confused.

The focus on developing pupils' writing and vocabulary has been maintained. Able writers in the Reception class are being challenged and supported more effectively. For example, they are encouraged to identify and collect new words and use them in their stories and are rising to the challenge to spell accurately. Some pupils in Key Stage 1 are able to identify their strengths and where they need to make improvements in their written work. Pupils with disabilities and special educational needs are increasingly proud of their writing and the improvements in sentence

structure and punctuation that they are making: for example, one pupil explained 'It feels like I am getting over hurdles, I feel I am getting better and learning more'.

Increasingly teachers are implementing the school's policy for marking and feedback but do not always check that pupils are responding to the advice or complete the extension tasks that they sometimes give them. Occasionally, assessments and targets for some pupils who have special educational needs are focused mostly on supporting their behaviour rather than developing their knowledge and skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Improvements in managing pupils' behaviour have been maintained since the previous monitoring visit: expectations are clearly understood by pupils. Most pupils are interested in lessons and respond thoughtfully to teachers' questions. Sometimes pupils in Key Stage 1 lose interest when the work they are given is unclear or unchallenging or when they are given too long to complete basic tasks. Absence rates remain high and very few strategies are being implemented to raise attendance.

School leaders and governors have implemented short-term measures to increase security of the school site. Staff are well briefed about their roles and are vigilant in exercising care. All pupils understand and follow these new rules and they play safely within the playground spaces.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Senior leaders and governors are working together more purposefully to tackle the remaining obstacles to improving the school. Governors are more informed about the strengths and weaknesses in the school's work as a result of more detailed information they now receive and the additional visits they make to follow through specific issues and concerns. More attention is being given to checking the quality of teaching to ensure that staff are supported, apply school policies, and do what is expected of them. However, leaders do not always focus enough on the difference that changes are making to pupils' learning or investigate the reasons for the slower progress of some groups.

Changes to the way in which mathematics is planned and taught have been implemented rapidly throughout the school and pupils are beginning to respond to more challenging work. Actions are beginning to improve the quality and rigour of assessment in the early years and staff are now much clearer about their responsibilities. Staffing changes and absence levels are reducing, however, the school's capacity to drive further improvement currently remains compromised. Little

headway has been made in developing middle leadership more widely throughout the school or in allocating responsibility for improving attendance.

External support

The frequent changes to teaching staff have meant that some aspects of training and support have not always taken root as quickly or as firmly as the local authority originally planned. Nonetheless, extensive advice and support has continued to be provided to the school. Pupils are starting to benefit from the recent, intensive work to support leadership of mathematics and the improvements in teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject.