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Mr Paul Towey

Headteacher

Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School

Sparrow Hall Road

Liverpool

Merseyside

L9 6BU

Dear Mr Towey

Special measures monitoring inspection of Our Lady and St Philomena's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 July 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 September 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 not making enough 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 Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director, Children and Young People's Service for Liverpool.

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Take urgent steps to improve the quality of teaching throughout the school so that it is at least good, in order to raise standards for all groups of pupils in all key stages, so that they can make good or better progress by:
 - ensuring that the basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics are taught consistently well in all classes, including in the early years, with a focus on improving writing in particular
 - raising teachers' expectations regarding the progress pupils should make, especially for disadvantaged pupils
 - using information about what pupils know and can do to set work that is suitably difficult, especially for the most able, and which helps them to learn well
 - ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to respond to teachers' marking and to improve their work themselves
 - planning work which pupils find interesting and challenging so as to improve their concentration and attitudes to learning.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels including governance by:
 - establishing rigorous systems to measure the performance of staff and the impact they have on raising standards for pupils and ensure that governors hold leaders to account for doing so
 - ensuring that planned improvement is rapid and keeps to tight timescales
 - setting up procedures to check that assessments of pupils' skills and knowledge are accurate
 - ensuring rigorous and specific targets are set for individual pupils which accelerate the progress of those who are underachieving so that they catch up quickly
 - regularly checking on the progress that all different groups of pupils make and taking swift action if any group are not achieving as well as they should.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring teaching is stimulating and motivates pupils well so that they develop good attitudes to learning
 - ensuring all teachers have the skills to manage pupils' behaviour effectively
 - improving record keeping so that systems are rigorous and all incidents of poor behaviour are noted along with the impact of any action taken in order to prevent reoccurrence.

- Improve pupils' attendance by:
 - ensuring that work with families to reduce absence is effective
 - checking and analysing patterns of absence in relation to specific groups, especially disadvantaged pupils, and using this information to identify the specific actions needed to improve attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils that

are frequently absent.

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 management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2 to 3 July 2015.

Evidence

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised a wide range of school and associated documentation, external monitoring reports including the review of governance, evidence of classroom monitoring as well as a range of documentation linked to behaviour and safety. He met with the headteacher and seconded deputy headteacher, as well as several other teaching staff. In addition, discussions were held with four groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, as well as two representatives from the local authority. All of the teaching observations were joint observations. Teaching sessions were observed in every year group in the school, apart from Year 3, and focused specifically on the impact of the teaching on pupils' learning and the quality of work in their books. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector completed a book scrutiny covering pupils' work in English, mathematics, science, history and geography.

Context

There have been minimal changes since the previous monitoring inspection in March. Some ongoing issues of turbulence in staffing have persisted which have affected some classes, notably Year 3.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Although overall achievement is not declining, the improvement currently being made is too slow overall. Improvement in achievement is inconsistent across the school and has stalled in some areas. Inconsistencies between classes and groups of pupils continue to be an issue and this makes it extremely difficult to determine any discernible patterns. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers persists in too many classes and, although closing in some areas, is widening in others. Pupils do not make consistent progress as they move through the school.

The improvement in the early years has been maintained, however. The proportion of children expected to reach a good level of development has more than doubled to 56%, which is now just below the national average. Children are now much better prepared for starting more formal learning in Year 1, especially in literacy and mathematics. However, the improvement in Reception cloaks more limited progress by those pupils who attend the nursery, with very few making any initial progress in their communication and language. Girls generally show greater improvement than the boys.

At Key Stage 1, the pass rate has increased slightly to 64%. Again this remains below the national average with boys, in particular, falling behind. Unfortunately, the

results of the phonics (letters and the sounds they make) screening test have been particularly disappointing and, despite earlier optimism, only 38% of children achieved the expected standard. This is very poor in comparison to national figures and represents a noticeable decline on the previous year. This reflects some weak teaching of phonics in Key Stage 1.

At Key Stage 2, outcomes are currently predicted to show improvement to 68% achieving the national standard. Although below the national average, it could ensure that the school, at least, achieves the minimum national floor standards for the first time in two years. Few pupils, however, are expected to achieve Level 5 targets.

Pupils remain positive about reading and the new library facilities have encouraged more children to participate and take pride in their reading. Unfortunately, there is a lack of rigour and organisation in managing the reading scheme books to the frustration of some pupils. They complained that, far too often, books of varying difficulty were all mixed up and it was problematic always finding copies of the reading books they required.

Writing remains an ongoing weakness. Pupils, especially the boys, continue to struggle to improve their writing. Poor spelling and punctuation continue to blight the quality of written work. Again, inconsistencies between classes and groups confuse the picture. Progress remains intermittent for far too many pupils and prevents them from expressing themselves well.

The quality of teaching

Teaching remains inconsistent across the school. In some classes and some subjects, teachers lack the conviction or subject knowledge to engage and challenge pupils effectively. There remains too much variability in the planning and delivery of lessons. Overall, teaching continues to require considerable improvement.

On the positive side, there has been some pleasing improvement in the early years with messages from the previous monitoring inspection being taken on board. As a result, provision has shown improvement. Sessions are much better organised than previously, especially in the Reception class. In the observed session, questioning sustained dialogue and good interaction between adults and children were clearly developing their speech and the sounding and recognition of words. Routines are becoming well established and are more rigorous, so that less learning time is being wasted. For example, access to snacks is continually available and does not disrupt or delay learning opportunities, whereas previously when it was a whole-class activity. Opportunities for writing are being promoted well in the Reception class. Outside play is also better organised with children on task and activities being sustained for longer periods. In the nursery, boys still focus on physical rather than creative activity and stray off task much quicker than the girls. Pupils are still

avoiding mark making opportunities and staff are not reactive enough in directing them towards these activities.

The teaching of phonics in Key Stage 1 remains weak and far too often ineffective, especially in those groups where the behaviour of a small minority of pupils is not being managed well. Teachers and teaching assistants are currently struggling to deliver the sessions with any conviction.

The teaching of guided reading is also problematic. A new approach has been tried recently and this has caused some confusion and disparity in approaches between classes. It is concerning to observe the same text being read by the whole class which contains a wide range of reading abilities, including from free readers to those pupils who can barely recognise letters. Whole-class texts do not suit such a wide range of reading abilities and weaker pupils, in particular, struggle to understand complex texts and find it difficult to complete tasks independently. Too many sessions are disrupted by high levels of noise with pupils wandering around or interrupting teacher-led groups.

Lack of subject knowledge, particularly in subjects other than English and mathematics, continues to depress standards. Despite an attempt to promote the leadership of subjects, teachers are still not confident in choosing the best resources or selecting the most appropriate approaches to engage pupils effectively. Pupils' work in books shows snippets of good work in history and geography but these are the exception rather than the rule.

In science, there is greater evidence of pupils completing experiments. However, as with other subjects, the most effective strategies are not always used and outcomes are weaker than they should be. Teachers sometimes lack the expertise to turn a good idea into a sequence of relevant and related learning opportunities, which progressively develops pupils' understanding of a particular aspect of science.

There is some emerging evidence from mathematics books that teachers are beginning to set a range of tasks, problems and calculations to suit the individual abilities of pupils better. However, this is not yet consistently embedded and lapses into repetitive tasks still occur.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Although pupils' general behaviour around the school is positive, pupils themselves identified that lessons are still frequently disrupted by the poor behaviour of a small handful of pupils. This continues to have a negative impact on the quality of lessons, shackles what teachers can do well and eats into learning time. Her Majesty's Inspector observed frequent calling out and fidgeting in too many lessons. Although this behaviour was challenged by teachers, this was often to little effect. Behaviour management systems in lessons are not as effective as they should be. In particular,

sending especially disruptive pupils to another class is not productive and can lead to further disruption, especially if these classes are being taught by less experienced teachers. Pupils themselves were sceptical that this approach was having any significant impact on the behaviour of miscreants. Behaviour management remains an issue and there has been insufficient quality guidance or training to provide teachers with effective and manageable strategies to control poor behaviour or raise expectations of good behaviour.

Attendance remains a major concern and is not improving. Strategies to raise attendance are clearly not working and there is a lack of rigour in those being used. For example, phoning home on the morning of an unauthorised absence and recording that there was no answer is not having much impact on changing behaviour. Currently, there are no effective strategies to follow this up. Disadvantaged pupils continue to be the most persistent offenders and this is perpetuating the attainment gap which exists between them and their peers. The lack of rigour with which this problem is being pursued was identified in the previous monitoring report and little has changed.

There is also a lack of rigour in the way in which behaviour and other incidents are recorded. This issue was raised as a concern during the inspection in September 2014 and was also identified as an issue in the previous monitoring inspection. This still remains a problem. Current recording systems are ineffective in providing relevant safeguarding information which could compromise pupils' safety. This is clearly not good enough and reflects badly on the management of the school.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Improvement has stalled because school leaders have taken their foot off the accelerator and not been rigorous enough in ensuring that the systems they have set up are being effectively managed and consistently applied across the school. There has been too much emphasis on process rather than impact. The lack of momentum in improving attendance, the delay in ensuring that incidents of poor behaviour are rigorously collated, systematically kept and evaluated and the ongoing failure to improve classroom behaviour are symptomatic of this. Monitoring of teaching is not rigorous and is not helping to improve teaching quickly enough. Too much is being left to chance. Although the school is better placed than a year ago, it requires firmer, more focused and determined leadership if it is to make the leap necessary to ensure that the judgement of special measures is removed.

Although staffing has been more stable, some ongoing staffing issues persist and need to be resolved. The curriculum continues to be underdeveloped and a clear teaching framework is not yet fully in place, ready for the start of the new academic year in September. Subjects are now being taught discretely and this is seen by teachers as being mainly a positive move. Subject leadership continues to be a work in progress and subject leaders are not yet in a position to drive forward

improvements in teaching and learning. Teaching of subjects, other than English and mathematics, continues to be fragmented and not always taught to a sufficient depth.

There are, however, some positive improvements. New equipment to enhance breaktimes and lunchtimes has been purchased. This has enabled pupils to make better use of the outdoor areas. Pupils also commented positively about the benefits of visitors and trips to support their learning and enhance their enjoyment. Use of data to monitor pupils' progress is more secure and accurate, although more remains to be done to use this information to target intervention and support more appropriately.

Governors continue to be supportive of the school and are disappointed by the current lack of progress. They have a visible presence around the school and attend the project group meetings. For example, they recently held discussions with pupils regarding improvements in reading resource provision. However, they are also culpable for the current lack of progress since they have tended to accept the positive messages being provided by school managers. They have failed to challenge the lack of progress in improving attendance and failed to follow up the issues linked to ensuring that safeguarding information was being rigorously and accurately collected and analysed. Governors now understand the need to maintain and sustain greater challenge to school leaders in order to ensure more rapid improvement than has been the case recently.

External support

The school has continued to rely heavily on local authority support to function in the short term, especially in providing consultant support and in challenging school leaders. Their recent review has also raised concerns about the pace of improvement and highlighted the lack of rigour in certain aspects of management. A decision to reduce support for school leaders to ascertain if they could function more independently has not been a success. There is an understanding that management support needs to be reinstated if the rate of progress is to be accelerated. Further support from a local school is planned in order to tackle current underperformance in teaching.

Priorities for further improvement:

- as a matter of urgency, ensure that the administration and recording of information that is necessary to keep pupils safe, especially records of incidents and misbehaviour, is robust and accurate.