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Mr Chris Gray  
Headteacher  
Grindon Hall Christian School  
Nookside  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR4 8PG

Dear Mr Gray

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Grindon Hall Christian School**

Following my visit with Dr Janice Gorch, Additional Inspector, to your school on 1 and 2 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 second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 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 sponsor's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

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 acting Chair of the Governing Body and the Executive Director of People's Services for Sunderland.

Yours sincerely

Mark Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2014

- Urgently improve the quality and impact of leaders, managers and governance, including in the sixth form, by:
  - setting more ambitious targets for what pupils can achieve
  - ensuring there is a consistent approach to tracking pupils' achievements across each key stage
  - monitoring the performance of staff more frequently so they are held to account for their work and understand the link between the quality of their teaching, the progress made by pupils and the rewards available through their pay
  - developing the skills of middle leaders so they can take a full and active role in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to pupils' progress
  - implementing a broad and balanced approach to the curriculum that exploits all opportunities, including assemblies and form time, to teach pupils about the fundamental British values they will need to live in modern Britain
  - make sure recruitment procedures are fair, open and transparent; secure the very best people for the job and ensure good value for money
  - ensuring the outcomes of the pupil premium and governance reviews are implemented rapidly so that there is appropriate and effective oversight of the school's work.
  
- Ensure all pupils feel and are kept safe and are well-prepared for life in modern Britain by:
  - ensuring all staff comply with the requirements of the school's health and safety policy
  - analysing incidents of poor behaviour and bullying so that the root cause of this conduct is understood, acted upon quickly and leads to a reduction in the number of exclusions and repeated incidents
  - implementing an effective programme of personal development, including sex and relationships education, so that pupils have a forum to raise issues, discuss the risks to which they may be exposed and feel better prepared to make important decisions in later life
  - raising pupils' awareness of equality and diversity in Britain today so that they are respectful and tolerant to those who belong to different faiths, cultures and communities.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and enables all pupils, especially those who are most able, to be challenged in their learning and reach their full potential, by:
  - ensuring teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve

- planning lessons that take account of what pupils already know and can do so that they are fully challenged in their learning, interested in their work and willing to respond to teachers' questions
- providing enough time for pupils to reflect and respond to questions, ensuring teachers take account of pupils' responses to adapt the lesson where necessary and address any misunderstandings
- sharing the best aspects of marking and feedback in the primary phase across the wider school, ensuring there is enough time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments
- increasing the opportunities for pupils to write at length and solve mathematical problems in a range of subjects and contexts
- ensuring children in the early years have greater opportunity to develop their learning through a range of activities they can choose for themselves, including in the outdoor environment
- ensuring those pupils resitting their GCSEs in the sixth form are adequately supported to achieve a better grade.

## **Report on the second monitoring inspection on 1 and 2 July 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, including two assemblies, and scrutinised documents. They also met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the whole staff, groups of parents and members of the governing body. They observed a range of lessons across the school. Five of these were joint observations with a senior leader. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their work and the school. They also scrutinised a range of pupils' work books and folders and observed the school at breaks, lunch-times and after school.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection the Chair of Governing Body has resigned. Seven members of staff have left the school, some of whom were leaders.

### **Achievement of pupils at the school**

- There have been no further external examination results since the previous monitoring inspection.
- Evidence gathered during this inspection demonstrates that children make good progress during their time in early years. Recent results of tests of Year 1 pupils' ability to recognise letters and sounds (phonics) are slightly lower than last year's.
- The school has identified that pupils' writing in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 is not good enough. There has been a significant fall in the numbers achieving expected levels in writing at the end of Year 2. At the end of Key Stage 2, although results for 2015 are expected to be an improvement on the previous year, they are still likely to be below the national average.
- According to the school's data, the numbers of pupils making expected progress in writing in Key Stage 2 are well below national averages.
- Teachers in the primary school have taken steps to address these shortcomings in writing by extending the opportunities pupils have to write at length in subjects other than English. Early signs, which are supported by inspection evidence, suggest that this approach is having a positive effect on pupils' skills in writing. However, it is too early to assess whether this improvement is sustained. Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) will assess this during his next monitoring inspection.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in primary in each year is comparatively small. In Key Stage 1, in 2015, where numbers are very small, all disadvantaged pupils are likely to achieve national standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This is an improvement on 2014's results. In Key Stage 2, all disadvantaged pupils are likely to achieve national expectations in reading but are likely to be below what is expected nationally in writing and mathematics.

- In Key Stage 4, school data suggest that there will be an increase in the numbers achieving national expectations of five good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics in 2015 compared to 2014. However, school data suggest a sharp drop in the number of disadvantaged pupils achieving national expectations. The 'gap' between these pupils and their peers is widening.
- The school's data suggest that A-level achievement will be slightly higher than in 2014.
- Pupils with special educational needs are making progress similar to their peers. However, support for these pupils is not always focused on their needs so that their skills and knowledge improve rapidly.

### **The quality of teaching**

- While showing improvement, there is still too much variability in the quality and impact of teaching. Not all teachers, especially those teaching in the upper school, have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. The teaching of primary-aged pupils is improving steadily.
- In the primary area and across most of the school the learning environment is attractive and conducive to learning with useful displays and examples of pupils' work celebrated. However, too often in the upper school, classrooms are untidy and the displays are of a poor quality.
- The school now collects more detailed information about pupils' learning and progress. However, teachers do not use these data effectively enough, especially in the upper school, to plan lessons that take account of what pupils already know. This is because this information is not always reliable and easy to access.
- There is now a school-wide, agreed approach to the marking of pupils' work. This is having a positive impact. However, not all staff follow it and there is variability in its application.
- Presentation in too many of the work books seen in the upper school is poor. This is because not all staff expect pupils to do their best.
- The marking of spelling, especially in the upper school, is variable. Even where spelling errors are identified it is not clear how this marking helps pupils learn to spell better next time.
- Marking in the primary school is often very detailed with teachers writing at length about pupils' work. The impact of these detailed comments has been limited because teachers are not making it clear exactly what they want pupils to do next to improve their work.
- Where teachers use questioning to challenge and extend pupils' learning and assumptions, progress is more rapid. In the lessons seen, too often teachers are content to ask questions that deal with 'what', rather than 'how' and 'why'.
- Although still not the norm, there are increasing opportunities for pupils to explore mathematics in depth. Inspection evidence showed teachers encouraging pupils to tackle more 'open-ended' activities that help pupils deploy their growing range of mathematical skills.

- In the primary school pupils are writing at greater length and in a wide range of styles and genres in subjects other than English. This is helping them grow in confidence as writers who are able to use language accurately and convincingly in a range of contexts.
- Teaching in the early years is improving rapidly. Inspectors observed children learning confidently and choosing activities that extended their skills and joy in learning. Their progress was observed carefully by staff and this information was used effectively to inform next steps in learning.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

- The school's actions to keep pupils safe are increasingly effective. Staff supervision of pupils at breaks and at the beginning and end of the day is careful and well organised.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They say that they are confident that adults at the school would deal with bullying, if it did occur, promptly and effectively.
- The school's use of 'internal' exclusion is still too high. Leaders do not fully understand or address the underlying reasons for the poor behaviour of some pupils. Leaders do not check that these pupils have carefully planned and supported work to do so that they do not fall behind their peers.
- The school has yet to implement fully an effective programme of personal development, including sex and relationships education. However, a member of staff to lead this important aspect of the school's work is now in place. He has consulted widely and a detailed and wide-ranging programme of study has been planned. This will begin in the new academic year. HMI will examine the impact of this during his next monitoring inspection.
- Leaders have implemented a detailed programme of study and related activities to help ensure that pupils are more aware of equality and diversity in Britain today. British values are discussed widely and there are increasing opportunities for young people to explore their roles as young citizens through, for example, membership of the school council. HMI will further examine the impact of this work during his next monitoring inspection.
- Pupils spoken with during the visit were polite, helpful and confident. Inspectors observed them moving around the school with care and an awareness of the needs of others. They were able to speak fluently about the school and their work. They reported that the school helped them understand how to keep themselves safe, including when on-line.
- Pupils are increasingly more involved in their learning. Those spoken with by inspectors reported that they liked the opportunities they are given through the marking of their work to reflect on their progress.
- Pupils are well behaved. During this monitoring inspection inspectors saw no examples of low-level disruption. Pupils were quick to settle in class, although they do not always move promptly to learning. There is still too much reliance on teachers and insufficient opportunities for pupils to take control of their own learning, especially in the upper school.

- Attendance at the school is similar to national averages. However, more needs to be done to support those pupils whose attendance is persistently poor.
- Parents report that they are very pleased with the service the school offers.

### **The quality of leadership in and management of the school**

- Leaders have moved promptly to address weaker teaching. A number of staff have left the school. However, there is still too much variation in the quality of the provision.
- Systems for monitoring the quality of staff performance are becoming more rigorous and leaders are beginning to take into account a broader range of evidence when assessing the impact of staff. However, senior leaders have not completed this work with sufficient urgency. They are still making judgements about staff performance that are too generous because they base them on too narrow a range of evidence. Currently, insufficient account is taken, for example, of how well teachers mark the work books of the pupils they teach.
- School leaders do not give governors detailed enough information about the school's performance. They do not present attendance figures, for example, in ways that make clear the relative attendance of the different groups of pupils, such as those who are disadvantaged, in the school. This means that governors are not always able to ask the challenging questions that will lead to sustained improvement.
- The way that leaders track pupils' achievement across each key stage is inconsistent and over-complex. As a result, there is a lack of clarity about how pupils are progressing. Also, this tracking information is not being used effectively to help teachers and other staff plan work for individuals and groups of pupils. HMI will look carefully at how leaders have addressed this issue during his next monitoring inspection.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is not sufficiently rigorous. The school places too much reliance on provision for these pupils that takes place outside the mainstream classrooms. Leaders have not made sure that training is targeted or that communication is very precise so that all staff know these pupils' needs in detail and clearly understand how best to support and challenge them.
- Although improving, middle leaders' skills are still not being supported sufficiently so they can take a full and active role in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements to pupils' progress. It is too early to assess whether the very recently introduced training and support package for middle leaders has had an impact. HMI will assess this aspect of the school's work during his next monitoring inspection.
- Leaders have put in place systems that make sure recruitment procedures are fair, open and transparent. However, inspectors identified shortcomings in the way the school promptly requests and checks receipt of testimonials from previous employers for recently appointed staff. This must be addressed urgently. HMI must be informed as soon as all missing testimonials have been received.

- The recent review of the impact of pupil premium funding (additional government money) has resulted in a more careful targeting of resources and a heightened awareness of the needs of this group of children. It is too early to say whether this is having a sustained impact on their performance. HMI will assess this during his next monitoring inspection.
- Governors are now much clearer about what the school must do to improve. They have sharpened their structures and appointed new governors. They have a clear plan and are beginning to hold leaders more rigorously to account.

### **External support**

- Following the judgement at the first monitoring inspection, the governors have now taken appropriate steps to ensure that the statement of action is fit for purpose. Governors are beginning to hold school leaders more effectively to account for the timely impact of their work.
- The school has recently forged links with two successful schools in the area, St Thomas More and Eldon Grove Academy. The Department for Education, working with the Regional Commissioner, has brokered this relationship. It is too early to assess its impact. HMI will assess this during his next monitoring inspection.
- The school is receiving effective support from Sunderland local authority. The authority is supporting the school in areas such as governance, human resources and helping assure the accuracy of teachers' judgements of pupils' work.