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30 November 2015

Dawn Titus, Executive Headteacher  
Geraldine Quinlan, Associate Head of School  
St Mary's RC Primary School  
Canterbury Road  
London  
NW6 5ST

Dear Mrs Titus and Mrs Quinlan

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

Following my visit with Kanwaljit Singh, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 10–11 November, 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 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 taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may 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 interim executive board 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 2014

- 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 10–11 November 2015**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors made short visits to all classrooms, jointly with senior leaders, to observe teaching and learning. Inspectors met with senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff. Meetings were also held with two members of the interim executive board including the chair. A meeting was held with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors met with two groups of pupils and observed them at play at break and lunchtime. A sample of pupils' work was scrutinised, as was documentation about their progress. A range of information about the school's safeguarding arrangements was examined, including records of recruitment checks.

### **Context**

The interim headteacher left the school in June 2015, at which time the executive headteacher, a national leader of education, and associate head of school were appointed. Since that time the school has received support from a partner school, St Joseph's RC Primary School, a national support school, also led by the executive headteacher. Senior leaders from the partner school work across both schools. A high proportion of teachers left the school at the end of the last academic year, with 11 teachers taking up their posts in September 2015. In addition, specialist teachers of music, physical education and French were appointed in September 2015. Three teaching assistants left the school at the end of the last academic year. New tables, chairs and touchscreens have been installed in every classroom. Cosmetic changes have been made to the building, including new flooring in all classrooms and corridors. The governing body was dissolved in September 2015, with governance functions being undertaken by an interim executive board (IEB). The chair of the IEB is a national leader of governance.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Performance of pupils currently in the school is stronger in the early years and in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2. The proportion of pupils who reached a good level of development by the end of Reception was above the national average in 2015. Similarly, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check was above the national average. By the end of Year 2, higher proportions of pupils than seen nationally attained the expected level. Higher proportions of pupils than average also achieved Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment at Key Stage 1 has risen steadily for the past four years and was significantly above average in writing in 2015. In 2015, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels at the end of Year 6 was below the national average in the reading, writing, and grammar, spelling and punctuation national tests. A higher proportion of pupils than seen nationally reached Level 4 in mathematics. Lower proportions of pupils reached the higher levels in reading than

seen nationally, and significantly so in writing. From their starting points, a higher proportion than average made the expected progress in reading and mathematics but fewer pupils made the expected progress in writing.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Leaders have introduced a 'soft start' to the school day; pupils arrive at school from 8.30am each morning. Those identified as being in need of additional support to boost their progress take part in focused writing or mathematics activities. Others arriving before the official start of the school day receive support with homework queries or they read quietly. This has led to a calmer start to the school day. It has enabled pupils who may have fallen behind to narrow the gap between their achievement and that of their peers.

Teaching assistants now receive more effective direction from teachers and their time is generally used well during lessons. They provide effective support for pupils, being well prepared and having a good understanding of the subject content of the lesson. Teaching assistants report being more involved in the life of the school and being valued for their contribution to pupils' learning.

Leaders have made effective use of the expertise of teachers at the partner school. They work alongside their year group colleagues at St Mary's to plan lessons together. This has ensured that teachers' expectations are appropriately high and that teachers are fully prepared. In most cases, work is matched well to pupils' needs, with appropriate resources available to support those of different abilities. However, sometimes the most-able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Occasionally, in mathematics, they are expected to listen to explanations of concepts with which they are already familiar. This prevents them making the progress of which they are capable.

Teachers show pupils how to use language correctly through their spoken and written communication with pupils. Pupils have responded positively to the introduction of regular extended writing lessons. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that they are increasingly keen to use newly acquired vocabulary. However, their enthusiasm to incorporate newly learned words sometimes leads to them constructing sentences that do not read well.

Teachers' feedback in pupils' books is detailed and regular. It generally focuses on what pupils have done well and encourages reflection about what could be improved. In mathematics, feedback comments sometimes focus on the process used to complete a calculation rather than on pupils' conceptual understanding. This leads to pupils focusing on the completion of tasks rather than on developing a deeper understanding of the topics taught.

Pupils' handwriting and presentation continue to improve. Expectations have been raised significantly. Pupils throughout the school write in cursive script, with high-quality examples on display in classrooms, corridors and on the school website.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Pupils are living up to the higher expectations imposed by leaders. Following the implementation of a new behaviour policy in June 2015, a number of pupils were excluded for incidents of misbehaviour. However, there have been no exclusions since the beginning of the academic year. Parents spoken to during the inspection were highly complimentary about the recent changes and about pupils' improved behaviour. Completed questionnaires from the school's own survey of parental opinion support this view. Pupils are polite, respectful and appreciative of the improvements to their school. Their attitude to learning is positive. They have a growing understanding of the value of education. One pupil described his teacher's determination for pupils to excel and to be successful in life. The electronic system to monitor pupils' behaviour is clear and effective. It allows leaders to identify trends and patterns in pupils' misbehaviour. A new school uniform was introduced at the start of this academic year. Pupils wear it with pride, and describe it making them feel more mature and giving them greater confidence.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

The executive headteacher and her team have brought much needed clarity to the leadership of St Mary's RC Primary School. Leaders, some of whom also work at the partner school, convey a clear sense of determination and commitment to increase the pace of change. In order to sustain the recently increased leadership capacity, it is intended that the current arrangements will be retained through a formal soft federation with the partner school. One parent summarised the recent changes at the school by explaining that 'the school has changed beyond recognition.' The newly established school vision, which declares that expectations for pupils are limitless, is displayed prominently around the school.

The new leadership team has acted swiftly to bring about the changes needed. Training for staff has been thorough, ensuring that newly appointed teachers were properly prepared for their roles prior to them starting work in September. Their collaborative work with colleagues at the partner school ensures that they have a good understanding of the standards expected of pupils in each year group.

Leaders have established a good balance between challenging and supporting staff. Responses to the school's staff survey shows that staff are proud to work at St Mary's and that they have confidence in leaders. Leaders check that teaching is having the desired impact on pupils' learning through a range of activities. They make sure that the information recorded about pupils' achievement matches the standard of work seen in pupils' workbooks and folders.

The local authority took decisive action to dissolve the governing body in September and put in place the IEB. The senior local authority officer, previously a member of the Rapid Improvement Group, which was set up to hold senior leaders to account for school improvement, is a member of the IEB. This has provided continuity and retained the required focus on school improvement. The process to recruit members to the new governing body is underway. It is planned that the chair of the IEB will chair the newly formed governing body.

### **External support**

The IEB comprises three members, each of whom has the necessary expertise to apply the challenge and support required. The board has kept a close eye on pupils' outcomes as well as ensuring that the other statutory governance functions are carried out effectively. The local authority brokered the appointment of the executive headteacher as well as the involvement of the partner school. This highly effective leadership has increased the pace of change in improving outcomes for pupils. Financial support from the local authority funded leadership posts during the transition from the previous to the current leadership arrangements, minimising any detrimental impact on pupils. A monitoring visit by local authority officers in the first week of the academic year reflects the local authority's appreciation of the urgency of the need to ensure rapid progress.