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Paul Scully
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Dear Mr Scully

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 and 27 January, 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 recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in June 2015.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose. The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire and the Director of Education for Nottingham Diocese. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of teaching, and thereby improve progress and attainment, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan lessons based on accurate assessment information about what pupils know and can do
 - set activities for pupils that consistently challenge them so that they can develop their writing and mathematical skills quickly
 - have high expectations for the progress of all pupils, including the most able
 - use questions skilfully to improve the range and quality of pupils' spoken responses, extend their learning and encourage all pupils to participate fully in lessons
 - provide good opportunities for Reception children to reinforce and extend their skills in the outdoor area.
- Raise pupils' achievement, especially in writing and mathematics, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - develop pupils' handwriting skills well
 - provide pupils with more practice to develop their reasoning skills in mathematics.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - procedures for collecting, organising and sharing data about pupils' performance are effective, and assessment information is used well to improve pupils' achievement
 - middle leadership skills are improved to enable the progress of vulnerable groups to be checked robustly, and for these pupils to receive the good teaching and support they need to make good progress
 - leaders, including governors, check all aspects of the school's work rigorously and follow up identified priorities and weaknesses swiftly
 - governors strengthen their capacity to hold leaders firmly to account
 - the school's website contains all the required information for parents.

An external review of governance, including the use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26–27 January 2016

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, deputy and assistant headteachers and other school leaders, including the early years leader and subject leader for English and mathematics. Inspectors also met other teachers in the school who do not lead core subjects. Inspectors met with the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority and a leading teacher employed by the local authority who is supporting the school. Inspectors spoke with parents and pupils. They observed teaching in all classes in the school. In total, they observed eight lessons, including two jointly with the headteacher, and toured the school with the Year 2 teacher to see learning in Reception and across Key Stage 1. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and checked the school's records regarding safeguarding. Inspectors also evaluated the school development plan, along with the external review of governance and of the pupil premium.

Context

Since the last inspection, the school has appointed an assistant headteacher and an assessment coordinator. Governors have also awarded a teaching and learning responsibility position to the leader for English.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils' attainment in mathematics has begun to rise. This is because teachers are giving them increased opportunities to develop their reasoning skills. Pupils' workbooks seen by inspectors show that rates of progress are increasing, with more pupils working at the levels expected for their age. However, a considerable number of pupils are not yet doing so. Leaders are aware of where there are gaps in pupils' understanding and knowledge, and are working to address this. Pupils' skills in solving mathematical problems remain underdeveloped because they do not yet have sufficient skills in calculation. Occasionally, pupils make progress that is too slow because they continue to receive work that is not challenging enough. At other times, it is because they do not have the practical apparatus readily available to support them in their learning, for examples using coins to help them count money. Pupils say that having access to the correct equipment would help them to learn faster.

Pupils' handwriting skills are beginning to improve. Staff are establishing a consistent approach across the school. Pupils' books that inspectors looked at show that most

pupils are writing more neatly and are beginning to display a pride in their work. Pupils that inspectors met with say that they enjoy handwriting, and feel that they are becoming more confident in using a joined handwriting style. Pupils in Key Stage 1 were keen to tell inspectors that they were looking forward to having one of the school's 'pen licences' so that they could move from pencil to pen in their writing books. This was helping to make them want to write neatly. Teachers introduced the new handwriting scheme in Key Stage 2 first. As a result, pupils' skills in handwriting are more secure from Year 3 to Year 6. Pupils' progress in handwriting in the early Years and Key Stage 1 is less well developed, but it is also improving. However, the rate of improvement is not fast enough. This is because not all staff model the school's handwriting style themselves when they write comments in pupils' workbooks. As a result, pupils become confused as to how they should form their letters.

Pupils are also improving their skills in reading and writing. The Year 2 teacher tours the school and checks each morning that teaching assistants are delivering learning to pupils effectively. Pupils are developing their skills in phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) increasingly well because staff know that pupils must learn secure skills in reading as early as possible.

Inspectors looked at a wide selection of writing books during the time of the inspection. These confirm that progress is increasing and that, as a result, standards in writing are beginning to rise. Recent work in books shows that pupils are starting to develop skills in a variety of writing styles, such as descriptive writing, poetry and reports. Pupils are learning what teachers expect of them and how to write in increasingly better ways because the tasks adults give them are broadly appropriate for their age. Pupils are also beginning to reflect on their own work and judge for themselves how well they have done. In some year groups, there are occasional examples of pupils helping each other to point out what they have written well. However, pupils' attainment remains low, as pupils have not yet learned sufficient skills to write confidently and fluently for their age.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are considering more closely what pupils can already do before they plan lessons for them. They are also asking better questions during lessons to check whether pupils have understood what teachers are explaining to them. Where pupils do not understand, they are usually noticing this. As a result, teaching is improving and pupils are making better progress. However, in some instances, teachers are not identifying where pupils have made mistakes, or where pupils are unsure, and then putting this right. Leaders need to ensure that staff check consistently that pupils have made the gains expected of them in each lesson and provide quick and effective support to any pupils who need it.

Teachers are providing pupils with more advice on how to improve their work. Pupils receive targets for their literacy and mathematics, and most know these well. Pupils say that this helps them have a clearer idea what skills they need develop. Pupils also now have a better idea of whether they have successfully completed the work that staff have asked them to do. However, staff do not always give pupils advice on what they need to do next when they have finished a particular piece of work. Where they do give advice, it is not always clear enough. When this occurs, the pace of learning is too slow. In addition, teachers do not consistently check that pupils follow the advice they are given. This means that pupils do not improve their skills fast enough.

Teachers have begun to increase the level of challenge that they give to pupils during lessons. There are encouraging signs of higher expectations from staff of what pupils can achieve. Teachers have written useful lists of the things they expect pupils to know at the end of each year in reading, writing and mathematics. This has been posted on the school website so that parents will be able to compare what their own child can do in relation to other pupils nationally of the same age. Pupils say that they particularly enjoy the 'chilli challenges' that staff give them regularly in lessons. However, pupils say that they are often ready to move on to more challenging work earlier than teachers allow them to. Pupils' workbooks show that, while the tasks that teachers give pupils to complete are more challenging than previously, the level of challenge is not consistently high enough. As a result, pupils are not yet developing their writing and mathematical skills quickly. In particular, teachers are not always giving the most-able pupils work that really makes them think deeply.

Teachers are questioning pupils more skilfully in lessons. As a result, pupils are responding well and explaining the work they have been doing, and why, to others. Pupils are now more actively involved in lessons, and told inspectors that that they like this change. Classrooms are starting to become purposeful learning environments where pupils discuss and collaborate in pairs and groups, as well as working more independently. Teachers are asking them a wider range of questions and this is improving pupils' confidence. Occasionally, teachers do not check that all pupils have a partner allocated to them when teachers ask them to work together. As a result, those pupils are not able to join in and complete the task successfully.

Staff in Reception are using the outdoor area to provide better opportunities for children to learn. The leader of the early years has worked well with a leading practitioner, in order to improve the provision in the outdoor area. When inspectors visited this, they observed that staff had planned the activities more effectively and that, as a result, children were enthusiastic. However, staff do not always use activities to promote children's learning as much as they need to. For example, staff

did not teach children about numbers effectively when children were playing hopscotch. Though children who were outdoors could tell inspectors the things they were doing, they were not as clear about the things that they were learning as those who were working indoors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils continue to be well behaved around the school. They play and work happily together, and relationships are friendly. Teachers have maintained their consistent management of behaviour and, as a result, pupils treat each other with respect and kindness. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are warm social occasions, and pupils told inspectors that there remains very little bullying or name-calling in school. When it happens, they say that adults continue to take notice of this and stop it quickly. Pupils that inspectors met during the visit told them that, if they are worried about something, they approach any member of staff, who deal with the issue effectively and promptly.

Pupils also continue to enjoy their lessons, and know that they need to work well and do their best. In almost all cases, they pay attention to teachers and listen correctly. Inspectors did not see any disruption during their visit. Pupils also present their work increasingly well because staff are ensuring that they take more care when writing. Exercise books, particularly in Key Stage 2, show that they take a growing element of pride when they complete tasks.

Pupils the inspectors met were keen to say that they remain very safe in school. They say that staff continue to teach them about a range of risks, including strangers, roads, rivers and staying safe online.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leadership in the school is improving. The headteacher makes it clear that he wants St Joseph's to be a good or better school as quickly as possible. Together with the deputy and assistant headteacher, they are building a united team of staff and are moving the school forward. Staff feel that they have a clear idea of what they are trying to achieve, and there is a strong focus on ensuring that everyone helps to deal effectively with the areas that were identified for improvement at the last inspection. Leaders have ensured that staff morale remains high, despite the inspection report that highlighted weaknesses in the quality of provision. The headteacher has maintained his approach. He leads with a quiet authority and commands the respect of his staff. Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, also express strong support for the school's leadership and a very large majority would recommend the school to others. Parents the inspectors met

during their visit confirm that they believe that the school is improving. They expressed particularly warm support for the headteacher.

Middle leaders are becoming more effective in their role. The leaders of English and mathematics have a clear idea of where stronger teaching exists, and where teaching is weaker. They are now ready to intensify the support that they give to teachers who need to improve most. They have worked with a consultant from the local authority to understand the importance of checking that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, make good progress in all year groups in the subject they lead. They also understand their role in making all staff accountable for the progress of their pupils.

Leaders have introduced a new electronic system for teachers to use to record pupils' achievements. The majority of teachers are now able to assess pupils broadly accurately. However, the system is new and is not able to compare pupils' progress in previous years to their current gains. As a result, leaders cannot show the governing body where rates of progress are currently accelerating. Staff are now assessing pupils more regularly, and so leaders will shortly be able to show governors in which classes progress needs to be improved the most. The system also does not currently show clearly the rates of progress for different groups, such as disadvantaged pupils. Leaders know that it is important for the governing body to hold them rigorously to account for the progress of all groups. They therefore understand that they must attend to this aspect quickly so that governors can receive the information they need to check progress.

Governors themselves are becoming increasingly skilled. Led by a committed and astute chair, and supported well by the vice-chair, they are focused firmly on ensuring that the drive for improvement does not slow. The governing body now have a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and understand which of the areas of the school's provision, such as improving outcomes for pupils, need to receive the most attention. They have readily accepted effective support from the local authority to be able to undertake their role better, undertaking tours of the school with advisors to see lessons taking place. They have begun to challenge senior leaders about pupil performance and about the quality of teaching. However, they are not yet able to do this effectively enough because the school's system for recording progress is new and does not yet hold sufficiently detailed information.

The governing body wasted no time in ensuring that an external review of their work was undertaken. This has been useful in showing governors what they do well, along with what they need to do to improve further. The review produced an effective action plan, which governors are putting in place. Governors have written a training plan for themselves to ensure that they have the skills they need, along with a programme of visits to classrooms. Governors have reviewed the system of

appraisal for the staff, including the headteacher. They have also ensured that leaders have completed an audit to ensure that they safeguard pupils effectively. In addition, governors have also improved their communication with parents, writing termly newsletters to inform them about the work governors are doing to move the school on. Finally, the chair of governors has begun to meet with individual governors to help them increase their own effectiveness. Governors know that it is important that all of them play an active part in checking that the school becomes good as quickly as possible.

The external review of the spending of the pupil premium did not highlight clearly enough that leaders are not using the fund effectively. Rather than use the pupil premium funding to improve the rate of progress for disadvantaged pupils, leaders have used much of it to try to raise outcomes for all pupils or improve to the quality of teaching generally. Leaders have used some of the funding to help disadvantaged pupils. However, they have allocated a considerable amount for uses that, while well intended, are unlikely to lead to these pupils making good or better progress. Because senior leaders have not spent the pupil premium effectively, there is no convincing evidence that the considerable gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils, both in the school and nationally, are closing. Leaders must address this immediately so that disadvantaged pupils begin to receive the full range of support to which they are entitled. The governing body also needs to check that any planned intervention is proving effective and that, if it is not, that leaders quickly adjust it so that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils accelerate.

Leaders have increased the amount of information on the school's website. However, it does not yet fully meet statutory requirements. The website does not contain an accessibility plan, nor make it clear what is being taught in each year group and subject. It also does not show the business and financial interests of each member of the governing body, nor any roles that they may have in other schools, as is required. The information relating to the impact of the primary PE and sport premium funding is too vague, and does not explain how the money is increasing pupils' enjoyment and participation in PE and sports. Most importantly, leaders have also not ensured that there is a clear evaluation of their spending of the pupil premium on the school website. This needs to show the success of this in narrowing the gaps for disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally.

External support

The school has received extensive support from the local authority before and since the inspection. This has helped governors undertake their role more effectively and allowed leaders to improve their skills in checking the quality of teaching and learning. It has also enabled an increasing amount of teachers to be able to assess pupils' work, and judge their progress, more accurately. Local authority

representatives have also helped individual staff to improve their teaching. For example, a leading practitioner in the early years has helped staff to improve provision in the outdoor area. Leaders are now ready to review this programme of support with the authority, so that it focuses on helping subject leaders to become highly effective in ensuring their colleagues deliver good teaching, and outcomes, in all year groups.