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25 February 2016

Mr Trevor Swann  
Interim Principal  
Grindon Hall Christian School  
Nookside  
Sunderland  
SR4 8PG

Dear Mr Swann

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

Following my visit with Lisa Crausby and Cathy Lee, Ofsted Inspectors, to your school on 9 and 10 February 2016, 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 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:

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

I strongly recommend that this Free 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 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
  - making 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 fourth monitoring inspection on 9 and 10 February 2016**

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised documents. They also met with the Interim Principal, the two Vice-Principals, middle leaders, individual and groups of parents, and members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body. They observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons across the school. Four of these were joint observations with senior leaders. As well as speaking with pupils in lessons and during social times, inspectors spoke more formally with a group of Year 5 pupils and with a group of Year 7 pupils about their work and experience of school. They also scrutinised a range of pupils' work books and folders and observed the school at breaks, lunchtimes and after school. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of Bright Tribe Academy Trust on the telephone. He also took into account 33 views expressed by parents through Ofsted's online Parent View survey, and the views of the Grindon Hall Christian School Parents Council as expressed in an email.

### **Context**

Since the previous inspection the Principal has left the school and an Interim Principal has been appointed. The school continues to explore sponsored academy status with the Bright Tribe Academy Trust.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

- Most children enter Reception with levels of development that are typical or above those expected for their age. They make generally good progress during Reception and are well prepared for school.
- Results of tests of Year 1 pupils' ability to recognise letters and sounds (phonics) are above national expectations. However, school predictions suggest that there will be a significant dip in these results in 2016 compared to 2015.
- Overall at the end of Key Stage 1, pupils are slightly below national expectations in reading and mathematics. They are significantly below national expectations in writing. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability do better in mathematics than in writing. They perform least well in reading, although there is evidence of improvement across all subjects.
- Pupils continue to make less progress than they should during Key Stage 2, particularly in writing. At the previous inspection, writing was identified by inspectors as an area needing urgent attention. The school has maintained the focus on writing identified in the November 2015 inspection. Evidence from this inspection shows that the quality of writing is improving, particularly in Year 4, but that this improvement is too slow.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year of the primary phase is small. As reported in November 2015, in Key Stage 1, where numbers are very small, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national standards in reading, writing and

mathematics. In Key Stage 2, all disadvantaged pupils achieved national expectations in reading, but were below what is expected nationally in writing and mathematics. Evidence from this inspection suggests that teachers do not focus carefully enough on the needs of disadvantaged pupils, ensuring that they make good and better progress in all areas.

- Overall, writing continues to be a key issue in the primary area of the school. Pupils are not being given sufficiently challenging writing tasks. They are not being given enough opportunities to write at length in a range of styles to suit a range of audiences.
- Since the previous inspection there have been no further GCSE or A-level results. However, the school has moved to strengthen its ability to predict results more accurately. Inspection evidence shows that leaders continue to improve the accuracy of the information they gather about pupils' performance through more robust challenge and testing. Leaders have also moved promptly to address weaknesses in particular subject areas where predictions were inaccurate. Leaders have done this through a combination of structured support and robust challenge of subject leaders.
- The school's half-termly checks of progress show that pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good or better progress when compared with their peers. This is because teachers are beginning to take more account of these pupils' needs in their teaching.
- The school's provision for the very small number of pupils who, for one reason or another, do not follow the full 'mainstream' curriculum, is very effective. Evidence gathered during the inspection showed clearly that these pupils were experiencing significant success and gaining confidence in their manipulation of number and language. This is the result of carefully focused and challenging teaching by the staff involved, combined with effective communication with their class teachers.

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

- Although improving overall, there is still too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. This is because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are still not always high enough. Also, teachers are not using the increasingly detailed information about the pupils they teach carefully enough to shape and focus their teaching. This results in insufficient account being taken by teachers of what pupils already know and what they need to learn next.
- There is evidence of teachers using deft questioning of pupils to develop their learning and skills. In a Key Stage 4 history lesson, the teacher used challenging questioning to move pupils beyond the mundane 'what' to explore the 'why' and 'how' of a particular historical situation. Through this, pupils gained confidence in their own skills and ability to use language to manipulate increasingly complex concepts. Pupils report that they learn from teaching that challenges and involves them. One pupil described it as an 'interactive' approach where she was actively engaged and challenged in her learning.

- Despite the improvements identified in the previous inspection report, there are still learning areas in the senior school that are untidy and drab. Opportunities are lost to stimulate and encourage pupils through striking display and celebration of their work on the walls of classrooms and corridors. The learning environment in the primary school continues to be vibrant and attractive. Pupils report that they take real pleasure in it.
- Inspection evidence shows that some staff are not following the school's marking policy. As a result, opportunities are missed to move pupils on in their skills and thinking. Additionally, because the marking of spelling is not always checked, pupils are copying out spelling 'corrections' incorrectly. As a result, misspellings are being reinforced.
- A programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) has recently been introduced across the whole school. Its implementation is being carefully monitored by staff. Pupils say that they welcome the course and the opportunities it gives them to discuss issues that affect their well-being and understanding of each other in and beyond the school. Early surveys of pupils' views of the course are positive, especially in the primary and lower years of the secondary school.
- In the primary school, pupils' writing skills are still not being well enough developed because too much time is wasted copying from worksheets or textbooks rather than developing pupils own writing skills. When given these opportunities, pupils thrive. For example, in a Year 4 English lesson, the teacher challenged pupils to describe a mythical beast using complex language. Pupils relished this opportunity and proudly showed off their similes and adverbial phrases.
- There is evidence of pupils taking real pleasure in reading in the secondary school. A group of Year 7 pupils spoke with real animation about the books they are reading and the pleasure they get from the regular opportunities they have to read. However, in the primary school, pupils do not have access to a library and, as a result, the importance of reading independently and for pleasure is neglected.
- In the early years, children are confident and choose activities that extend their skills and pleasure in learning. Their progress is recorded by staff and this information is used effectively to inform next steps. However, it was noted during the inspection that the 'learning journals' that record children's progress had not been updated for some time.

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

- The school's actions to keep pupils safe are effective. Leaders ensure that safeguarding systems continue to be effective and rigorously monitored. Staff supervision of pupils at breaks and at the beginning and end of the day is careful and well organised. The recent introduction of high-visibility jackets for staff at these times helps pupils to identify where the adults are if they need them.

- Pupils are well behaved and careful of each other's needs. Parts of the school site are cramped and pupils take full account of this, moving around carefully, showing concern for others.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. They understand the range of forms that bullying can take, including homophobic bullying. Pupils in the senior school are clear about what they should do if they or someone they knew was being bullied. However, some pupils in the primary school were not as clear as they should be about what they should do if they or a friend was concerned about bullying. This must be addressed urgently.
- Overall, attendance at the school is similar to national averages and improving. The school, aware of the need to improve, has very recently introduced systems that gather information about patterns of lateness and absence and then uses this information to support pupils and their families so that they can improve their punctuality and attendance. Early signs are that this is already having a significant impact, particularly on punctuality in the primary school.
- The school's care of vulnerable pupils and families is effective. It combines detailed knowledge of pupils' and families' needs with a 'no excuses' approach to help ensure that pupils get the best from their time in school. Support is offered promptly and appropriately. Evidence gathered during the inspection shows that the school works hard, sensitively and effectively to involve and engage with the full-spectrum support available to benefit the pupils and families who need it.
- The school's procedures for the appointment of staff are effective.
- Parents report that they are very pleased with the service the school offers.

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

- The very recently appointed Interim Principal has already had a significantly positive impact on the school. He has quickly established a more open culture of high expectations and shared it widely with staff, governors and pupils. They welcome this.
- The Interim Principal has identified the key actions needed to ensure that the pace of improvement in the quality of teaching is more rapid. He and senior leaders have undertaken a series of 'learning walks' to assess the quality of teaching. He has followed these up with 'one-to-one' conversations with staff about their work and aspirations for the school. This is having a positive impact on staff and their understanding of what needs to be done.
- The Interim Principal, working with governors, has reshaped the senior leadership team and addressed the issue of a lack of overall leadership in the primary area by giving one of the two Vice-Principals oversight of this vital aspect of the school. This is beginning to have a positive impact on work in the primary area.
- The systems for monitoring the quality of staff performance are now established at the school. They take into account a wider range of evidence and both staff and leaders are increasingly clear about what they need to do to improve. While, as a result of these actions, there is clear evidence of improvement in staff

performance across the whole school, there is still some way to go before all pupils receive the quality of teaching they deserve.

- Leaders track pupils' progress across each stage with increasing effectiveness. There is a growing body of detailed information about pupils' performance that highlights their strengths and areas for improvement. However, staff do not consistently use this information to focus their teaching so that pupils make sustained progress.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability continues to develop. However, inspection evidence shows that staff are not taking sufficient account of the needs of this group of pupils. There is still too much reliance on provision for these pupils that takes place outside the mainstream classrooms.
- Middle leaders' skills and insights continue to improve. They report that, despite feeling that they do not have sufficient time to fulfil their roles, they are now more able to initiate and contribute to whole-school actions. For example, a project that offers additional opportunities for the most able has recently been initiated by a middle leader. Early indications are that this will have a positive impact on this group of pupils.
- The Interim Principal is very clear that an effective governing body must have full, detailed and accurate information about the school's performance if governors are to fulfil their role of setting the strategic direction of the school and holding leaders to account for its performance. Inspection evidence shows that this more direct approach is already having a positive impact. Governors are more informed and are, in turn, asking appropriately challenging questions about the school's performance.

### **External support**

- The school is receiving effective support from Benedict Biscop Church of England Academy, an outstanding local teaching school. This support has focused on supporting leaders and developing ethos.
- The school is also receiving effective support from Bright Tribe Academy Trust. Bright Tribe is supporting the school with leadership, developing the post-16 curriculum and financial and staffing matters.