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Jo Kingston
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Dear Jo Kingston

Special measures monitoring inspection of Holy Cross RC Primary School

Following my visit with Iain Freeland, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 12 and 13 July 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 that 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 that took place in November 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 chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Clifton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of

children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2015

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - rapidly securing permanent leadership for the school
 - setting clear priorities which are checked and evaluated by all leaders, including governors, to ensure that actions taken are working well and bringing about the necessary improvements
 - implementing a robust, structured programme of development and support to equip subject leaders with the skills needed to be highly effective leaders
 - ensuring that the subjects taught are well planned and effectively cover all areas of learning.

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have a robust and structured programme of training to develop their practice rapidly
 - accurately assess what pupils can and cannot do to inform planning so that learning is sufficiently challenging for all pupils, especially the more able
 - question effectively in order to assess, probe and deepen pupils' learning
 - provide pupils with high-quality feedback to enable them to understand how they can improve their work
 - learn from the best practice within the school and in other schools identified as being highly effective in raising pupils' outcomes.

- Urgently improve pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve, especially in Years 1 and 2, and for boys across the school
 - the most-able pupils are given activities that inspire, excite and challenge them to think more deeply about their learning
 - disadvantaged pupils receive more effective support to meet their individual needs.

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 first monitoring inspection on 12 and 13 July 2016

We met with yourself and your advisory headteacher. We held discussions with subject leaders and other teachers who have areas of responsibility. We also talked to the chair of the governing body and four other governors and the school improvement officer from the local authority. My colleague had a telephone conversation with the director of schools and colleges for the Diocese of Clifton and I spoke to three of the headteachers from the Aquinas Group, which is an informal group of nine local Catholic schools who work together on a range of activities, including school improvement. We observed pupils in lessons and discussed their work with them. We sampled the work in their books and scrutinised school documentation. We talked to two different groups of pupils. We also met a small group of parents informally and considered parents' most recent responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Context

In January 2016, the local authority seconded an experienced headteacher to the school for two days a week to provide you with leadership support. Subsequently, you have been appointed as the substantive headteacher of the school from September 2016. Since the inspection, three teachers have left, including the deputy headteacher. They have been replaced by teachers who have been employed on temporary, fixed-term contracts. Two of these will take up permanent posts from September, one to the role of assistant headteacher, following a further recruitment process. A teaching assistant has left and another has been appointed. The learning mentor has also recently left following a review of posts in the school. There is a new business manager and a new clerk to the governors. One governor recently resigned due to a change in personal circumstances. Since the inspection, there have been a number of changes made to the school building, including a new entrance area and an extension to the Reception class. The school is now part of the Aquinas Group. The governing body is in receipt of an Academy Order but awaits the outcomes of discussions between the Diocese of Clifton and the Department for Education before exercising the Order. However, they are moving towards formal collaboration with other schools.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Your appointment to the school as substantive headteacher has secured permanent leadership for the school. You work very well with the experienced advisory headteacher and appreciate the strong support and guidance you receive. Working closely with your Catholic school colleagues has also enabled you to seek first-hand experience of best practice in other similar schools.

Since the inspection, you and your governors have made positive changes to the leadership team and staffing structure of the school. Systems to evaluate the performance of individual teachers have been redrafted and are closely aligned to

the progress that the pupils are making. This has enabled senior leaders to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching staff closely and provide support where it is required. Your new middle leaders have already received training and have worked alongside subject leaders of education for English and mathematics. Consequently, they have a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a clarity about what specific actions need to be taken to improve teaching and learning. Local authority consultants are also providing practical help and guidance. For example, you have acted swiftly on their advice and guidance to reorganise and restock class libraries and home reading books. This is making reading much more appealing to pupils and has encouraged them to access a wider range of books.

The governing body responded swiftly to the need for an external review of its work and the school's use of its pupil premium funding. Following these reviews, governors have restructured their committees and have a much better understanding of the progress that different groups of pupils are making. You keep them well-informed and they have developed stronger links with the subject leaders. This has enabled them to challenge the work of the school more robustly.

The governing body is delighted to have finally secured permanent leadership for the school and speaks very positively about the stability which you have established. Governors have been involved in other staff appointments and know that they need to develop sharper procedures for recruitment. Members of the governing body are also sensitive to your role as a new headteacher being supported by a leadership team which has also been appointed recently. As a consequence, they have sensibly put into place plans that will provide you and your leadership team with mentoring and support.

The governing body appreciates the way in which it is kept informed about school issues. Governors probe the information you and your subject leaders provide for them with and are not afraid to ask how actions being taken are improving teaching and learning.

The parents we spoke with were pleased with the recent changes that have been made. In particular, they appreciate the stimulating topics their children are learning about which involve interesting visits out of school. They were also pleased about the improved focus on the development and celebration of their children's artistic skills.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The focused training and mentoring that teachers receive has started to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are using the school's agreed marking policy more consistently and this is helping pupils to understand what they need to do next to improve their work. There is a much greater level of challenge in lessons, with pupils being given a clear direction on how to extend their knowledge and apply their skills. Classroom displays are used

well as a tool for learning – helping the pupils to work out problems for themselves. You and the advisory headteacher are working with the teachers to develop further pupils' use of their reasoning and problem-solving skills to tackle a range of different styles of questions.

By introducing commercial assessment systems which check how well pupils are doing in English and mathematics, you and the advisory headteacher have successfully managed to develop a consistent approach to the collection and use of progress information. This information is being used well by class teachers to check that all pupils are making the progress they are capable of. These include pupils who are disadvantaged and those groups who have previously been underachieving. You and your teaching staff know your pupils well. The introduction of regular meetings on pupils' progress is ensuring that pupils' individual needs are carefully planned for and that additional support is provided. There is now a much greater focus on the progress of the most able pupils, those who are disadvantaged and boys, with extra actions taken to help them meet, or exceed where they have the potential, their age-related expectations.

Teaching assistants are effectively deployed both in class and when working with individual groups or pupils. The training they have received since the inspection in November has enabled them to gain the knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and the confidence they need to support both teachers and pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are polite and courteous as they move around the school. Year 6 pupils, who are shortly to move on to secondary school, are a credit to the school by demonstrating maturity, responsibility and a good measure of common sense. Attitudes to learning are improving and, in most lessons, pupils are increasingly attentive and keen to learn. However, you are fully aware that, as yet, this is not a completely consistent feature throughout the school. Nevertheless, you are appropriately tackling those situations where pupils who become restless, bored and, at times, boisterous. Although pupils present their work neatly in their English books, it is not always the case in other subjects.

Attendance has improved but there are still too many pupils who arrive late for school and miss valuable learning time. You encourage those pupils who are continually late to attend the breakfast club free of charge. The weekly early morning sessions you have recently introduced, to encourage parents to work alongside their children as they learn, also encourage families to get to school earlier. However, these initiatives have yet to improve punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes for pupils are improving and there are examples of accelerated progress in some year groups. Results in the recent Year 1 national phonics screening check

have improved impressively. This is because training has improved both teachers' and teaching assistants' knowledge of phonics. Reading skills are improving in all other year groups. This was underpinned by an extensive investment in new resources, high quality external training and a refreshed approach to the planning of reading sessions in class.

Boys are making much better progress now and their outcomes are improving. This is because they now learn about more stimulating topics and so they are more interested in these lessons. For example, 'Brilliant Bristol' particularly ignited the boys' interest in learning about the skills involved in the building of bridges and the work of Brunel. Disadvantaged pupils are making faster progress because teachers keep a careful check on how well they are doing and provide extra help and support when required. Early morning sessions to practise key skills are popular and support pupils' progress.

The proportion of children in the current Reception class that reached a good level of development was similar to last year's outcomes which were in line with national averages. Nevertheless, you are fully aware that more children, particularly boys, could achieve and exceed the expected level for their age if they had access to an outdoor area that extended and strengthened their literacy, numeracy, physical and personal development skills. Plans to improve the outdoor area are securely in place and will be implemented during the autumn term.

External support

You and your staff are being very well supported by the headteacher from Elmlea Junior School who has helped you to develop clear systems and processes. These are supporting the improvements to the quality of teaching and raising pupils' outcomes. Your staff have visited the Elmlea headteacher's school and other schools identified as having specific relevant best practice. You are being well supported by colleagues from the Aquinas Group. The school has benefited from two local authority consultants who have helped with improvements to the teaching of reading and the planning of interesting topics. Subject leaders of education from Ashton Gate Primary School are working with your subject leaders to improve their planning and teaching of English and mathematics. The local authority is providing support through the school's improvement partner who regularly assesses the effectiveness of the improvement strategies.