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Dominic Hemington
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hemington

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 October 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 April 2016.

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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim management board, the director of education for the diocese of Shrewsbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2016.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - systematically and rigorously evaluating the impact of actions to improve pupils' learning, particularly those relating to improving outcomes for disadvantaged and most-able pupils
 - sharply focusing the evaluation of teaching on the impact it has on pupils' learning and systematically checking that areas for improvement have been acted upon effectively
 - improving the quality and breadth of information received by the governing body and multi-academy trust so that they are better equipped to hold leaders to account
 - improving the quality of middle leadership and more rigorously holding them to account to ensure they have best impact on securing improvement in their areas of responsibility
 - developing the rigour and accuracy of the school's self-evaluation
 - raising governors' expectations of the outcomes for pupils especially those who are disadvantaged.

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged and those most able
 - ensuring teachers use accurate assessment to plan appropriately challenging work for the most able, including those who are disadvantaged
 - ensuring teachers adhere to the school's policies on teaching including those relating to feedback and marking
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge of special educational needs and the new national curriculum.

- Improve the outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring the most able receive sufficient challenge and guidance to reach their full potential
 - ensuring appropriate and sharply focused support for disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, so they close the gaps with other pupils nationally and their peers in school
 - reducing the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils further
 - continuing to enhance the quality of teaching in early years, particularly of core mathematical and English skills, so greater proportions of children reach a good level of development.

External reviews of governance and the school's 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 12 to 13 October 2016

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the seconded assistant headteacher, three middle leaders and a member of staff responsible for attendance. HMI had a discussion with four members of the interim management board and also met with the consultant headteacher commissioned to support the leadership of the school, as well as a representative of the local authority. HMI met with 10 pupils to discuss the changes that have happened in the school since the previous inspection. HMI visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. The statement of action and school's plan for improvement were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a new deputy headteacher has been appointed. An assistant headteacher has been seconded to the school, initially for a year. The governing body has been replaced by an interim management board.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose because it makes it clear the actions it will take over the next two years towards the removal of special measures. Achievement targets are appropriately ambitious and indicate the school's commitment to being a good school at the end of the period of improvement. There is a clear outline of the training that staff will receive to improve their practice. The timescales for these developments are planned and spaced appropriately, so that there is a chance for staff to embed what they learn. Parent consultations and meetings have already taken place and there is a weekly opportunity for parents to come to school, talk to teachers and see first-hand what their child is learning. No time has been wasted in implementing the actions outlined in the statement.

The school's action plan for improvement needs further refinement to ensure that it is a useful working document and supports the school in driving forward the improvements that are required. The plan needs to include accurate, ambitious targets for pupils at the end of each key stage, at the end of the early years and in meeting the required standards in phonics. The plan includes each of the three main improvement points; however, some important aspects are missing. For example, plans should aim to improve all pupils' progress, not just that of disadvantaged pupils and the most able. There are also some significant groups in school that are not being monitored and checked for progress, such as pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils that are persistently absent.

Despite the weaknesses in some aspects of action planning, the leadership team has wasted no time in starting to tackle key areas of weakness.

An external review of governance has not yet been commissioned. However, the trust acted swiftly to remove the governing body that was in place at the time of the last inspection. The newly formed interim management board is better equipped to drive improvement. The management board is made up of members who have leadership experience in education. Although they are still settling into their new roles, they are beginning to ask challenging questions. They are asking for the information they want to see from the headteacher and senior leaders of the school and insisting on refinements if it does not provide them with enough detail.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Staff were obviously disappointed with the outcome of the previous inspection and morale has suffered. However, they have been quick to respond to demands made by school leaders to start the school off on its road to recovery. A range of training for staff has been put in place and it was evident during the monitoring visit that staff were embracing the changes and working hard to put them into practice in their classrooms.

It has been tempting to try and tackle all areas needing improvement at once but the leadership team's decision to focus on a few key areas to implement in the first instance is a sensible one. This gives staff time to consolidate and embed the improvements they are required to make. It is important, however, that an urgent pace is maintained.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Systems have been put in place to check persistent absence much more closely. There is a greater emphasis in the classrooms on the importance of good attendance and pupils who struggle with their attendance are given individual support and encouragement. As a result, this is already having a very positive effect on absence figures that, to date, are half what they were at the end of last term.

Outcomes for pupils

The outcomes information for pupils in 2016 is beginning to indicate small improvements but, in most instances, outcomes are still below what would be expected. In 2016 the percentage of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception and the percentage of pupils that met the expected standard in the national phonics screening check has improved compared to previous years. However, both are still below the level of pupils of a similar age nationally.

This picture is similar in both key stages 1 and 2, with pupils' attainment and progress below the expected standard in reading, writing and spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, mathematics at both key stages is comparable to expected standards. Pupils are also below the higher expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

The 2016 results indicate that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils is still too low.

A review of the use of pupil premium has been completed and the recommendations have been implemented. Leaders have set up a range of additional intervention groups to address any gaps in pupils' learning. The pupils say that they really enjoy these groups. However, it is too early in the term to be able to evaluate the impact that this is having on accelerating pupils' progress.

The collection of assessment information in the school has been completely revised. The system is simple and clear. It allows leaders and teachers to be able to check on the progress of all pupils and groups, such as disadvantaged pupils and the most able, in much more detail. The first set of pupils' assessment information is being collected by the end of October. HMI will focus on the impact of this system at the next monitoring visit.

External support

The trust has brokered external support for the school through a consultant headteacher and an early years specialist. The consultant headteacher has only been working with the school for a short time due to a previous consultant stepping down from the role in September. The early years specialist has worked with the early years leader in school since the summer term. She is working to develop leadership capacity and the development and organisation of early years provision. Both have made a good start. However, it is too early in the term to assess their impact.