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Mr Dominic Hemington
Headteacher
St John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Woodhouse Lane
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Dear Mr Hemington

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

Following my visit with Rob Larkin, Ofsted Inspector to the school on 7 and 8 February 2017, 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2016. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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.

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

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 the 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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 7 February to 8 February 2017

Evidence

During this inspection, the inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, two middle leaders, a member of staff responsible for attendance and one responsible for maintaining the single central record for safeguarding. The inspectors 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. An inspector also spoke on the telephone to an early years consultant who has provided support to the school. The inspectors met with eight pupils to discuss the changes that have happened in the school since the previous inspection. They visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. Inspectors looked at a number of documents, including information about pupils' achievement, school self-evaluation, the school development plan, behaviour and incident logs and documents relating to attendance and safeguarding.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the assistant headteacher, who was initially seconded, has become a permanent member of staff. Two teachers have left the school. Two teachers appointed to temporary posts have replaced them. A new consultant headteacher was appointed to support the leadership of the school in November 2016.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leadership team are taking appropriate action to ensure that the school is moving forward. A regular cycle of monitoring teachers' performance has been established and has resulted in leaders being much clearer about the strengths and weaknesses in teaching across the school. This has identified weak and ineffective teaching, which leaders are tackling quickly and appropriately. The training for all staff in the teaching of reading has been particularly effective and is evident in staff's increasing confidence and also in the progress of pupils in this subject across the school. However, there is still much to do. Leaders need to insist on the highest quality of teaching in all subject areas. Training is urgently required, particularly in key stage 2, to support the teaching of writing and mathematics.

The school development plan has been appropriately adjusted as a result of the suggestions made at the last monitoring visit. It now identifies all pupils, as well as pertinent groups such as disadvantaged pupils, the most able, pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who are persistently absent. The school's self-evaluation covers all aspects needed but would benefit from a deeper

emphasis on describing the intended impact of each action or aspect. This will help leaders and members of the interim management board to pinpoint more precisely the successes and areas that still need more focus.

Leaders have worked hard to establish a clear, simple but effective system to gather and present pupils' assessment information over the academic year. This has been successful. School leaders and members of the interim management board are now in a much stronger position to check regularly on the progress of pupils, discuss with teachers the progress of individuals within their class and plan ways of ensuring that pupils catch up where needed. Senior leaders have given a lot of thought to ensuring accuracy in the data collected and this will be further enhanced by developing a programme of regular checking activities across the school. Comparing assessments with other schools will also be useful so that leaders have a shared understanding of the highest possible expectations and standards.

Since the previous monitoring visit, the newly formed interim management board has grown in confidence and focus. Members have quickly established themselves and are now offering the headteacher and senior leaders much stronger, appropriate challenge. Praise is given where needed but the board conveys a sense of high expectation, honesty about where the school is on its improvement journey and a drive that makes an important contribution to the forward movement of the school. The new senior leadership team is beginning to establish itself and there are some emerging strengths. However, the interim management board needs to keep a close eye on the extent to which all members of the team are having an impact on improvement. It also should consider if the senior leadership team would benefit from being further strengthened, particularly in supporting the required, swift development of key stage 2. It is important that the pace of improvement becomes more rapid.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Morale among staff is still fragile but they have worked hard to take advantage of the professional development offered.

There has been a steady improvement in the impact of teaching in the early years. There is a greater consistency of teaching and learning across Nursery and Reception classes. The early years team has focused successfully on improving the learning experiences that children are given and, in particular, offering more chances to write and use number in all areas of provision. For example, during the inspection, children in the Nursery were writing down telephone messages in the home corner and, in Reception, children were pretending to visit a takeaway restaurant counter and writing down customers' orders. The quality of provision outside, however, is not of the same standard as indoors. It needs improvement so that children have plenty of opportunities to use good-quality resources and activities to continue their learning.

There is now some strong, consistent teaching across key stage 1. The best teaching offers challenge and has high expectations of pupils. Pupils rise to this and are visibly enjoying their learning, which they say is fun. Teachers use assessment information well to pinpoint precise learning needs and so lessons cater well for the range of learning needs within the classes.

However, teaching and learning across key stage 2 are not strong enough. The leadership team is aware that there are serious concerns regarding the teaching and learning offered to lower key stage 2 pupils. In addition, in upper key stage 2, there remain a lack of rigour, insufficiently high expectations and low levels of challenge for too many pupils.

The focus on reading across the school is very evident. In this subject, staff have been trained and they teach aspects such as phonics and comprehension with increasing confidence. This has had a very positive impact on the progress pupils have made in this subject since the beginning of the academic year. While maintaining the 'push' the school has established in reading, they now need urgently to turn their attention to writing and then mathematics.

One of the ways the school has addressed significant underachievement has been through offering targeted and intensive intervention groups to pupils. This has worked well in reading, with a significant impact on pupils' skills and confidence. However, it appears that pupils are out of class on interventions frequently and they may be missing out on activities back in the classroom. There is some blurring of accountability for pupils' progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Attendance in school is above the national average as a result of good-quality systems, monitoring and a strong emphasis on the importance of attending school. Staff respond quickly to any absence. The increased focus on the attendance of pupils who are persistently absent has been successful, with a reduction this academic year from 24 pupils to only nine. The school is rightly focusing on making sure that all pupils arrive in school on time. Currently, some pupils are missing out on their learning because they have missed the start of their lessons.

Behaviour and conduct around school are generally positive. Pupils are polite and friendly and display a sense of kindness and care for each other. Where teaching is stronger, pupils have a positive attitude to their work and are keen and eager to learn. Pupils particularly like being challenged and extended in activities and were keen to tell inspectors that they enjoyed lessons where they were given this opportunity. However, too frequently, teaching is still not challenging enough. A lack of challenge leads to pupils, particularly the most able, being easily distracted and often half-hearted in their attitude to work. During the inspection, many pupils were uninterested or bored with what they were being asked to do. In these lessons, pupils ignored the teacher, whistled, had play-fights and engaged in low-

level disruptive behaviour. Some pupils were demoralised and demotivated.

Outcomes for pupils

Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge below the level of children of a similar age. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development has slowly increased over time but has always been below national averages. This year, with the improvements in provision and teaching, it is predicted that pupils will achieve very close to national averages.

Pupils' acquisition of phonics skills is very closely checked and assessment information indicates that, since the beginning of the academic year, many pupils have made rapid improvement. This has been as a result of staff learning from the phonics training they have received. It is anticipated that, at the end of Year 1 and Year 2 in 2017, the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard will be at least as high as the national average.

The new assessment system and its first set of information give a clear indication that the work the school has done to improve standards in reading is having a positive impact. All classes are at or close to the challenging targets set for them, except Year 4. However, assessment information also indicates that across all year groups the pace of progress in writing is insufficient and needs urgent attention. In some classes progress is poor.

Assessment information starkly highlights problems in particular year groups, for example, grammar, spelling and punctuation in Years 4 and 6. It also reinforces the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning in different classes and highlights again the concerns about the rates of progress across key stage 2. This needs pressing attention.

Disadvantaged pupils represent a large proportion of pupils in the school. They are closely monitored and targeted for additional support if required. They are making stronger progress in reading now but relatively weak progress in writing. Disadvantaged pupils are making reasonable progress in early years and key stage 1, but are still achieving significantly less well than other pupils in school and nationally at key stage 2. The most able pupils have been identified and their progress is checked regularly. However, because much of the teaching, particularly in key stage 2, does not consistently challenge and extend these pupils, there is limited evidence of improvement. Evidence seen in pupils' books confirms that these pupils are not exposed to learning opportunities that are sufficiently demanding.

External support

The school has benefited from a range of external support from specialist subject consultants. Staff have received effective training in the teaching of reading. The trust acted swiftly when the external support that it had initially brokered for

leadership was unsuccessful. A new consultant headteacher has now been recruited and has been working with the school since November 2016. She has valuable experience of improving a school in challenging circumstances. A productive relationship is developing between her and the school's leadership team and this is helping the headteacher to tackle staffing issues and to develop leadership skills and assessment. The regular input from an early years consultant to the early years leader in school continues to be effective. She has been working to develop leadership capacity and the organisation of the early years provision. Her support is well received by the school and all advice is acted upon. As a result, there is a noticeable improvement in the indoor learning environment across the provision. The trust has a positive working relationship with the local authority and the support that the adviser offers the interim management board is valued. The local authority and trust have secured the services of a quality-assurance professional to provide advice and validate the school's self-evaluation.