

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



15 June 2017

Mr Dominic Hemington
Headteacher
St John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary School
Woodhouse Lane
Benchill
Manchester
M22 9NW

Dear Mr Hemington

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

Following my visit to your school on 17 and 18 May 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 third 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.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that the school may 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 funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 17 May 2017 to 18 May 2017

Evidence

During this inspection, HMI held meetings with the headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, the acting assistant headteacher and a member of staff responsible for attendance and one responsible for maintaining the single central record for safeguarding. HMI had a discussion with two members of the interim management board and met with the consultant headteacher commissioned to support the leadership of the school, as well as a representative of the local authority. Fourteen pupils met with HMI to discuss the changes that have happened in the school since the previous inspection. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. They looked at a number of documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; school self-evaluation; the school development plan; planning and monitoring files; behaviour and incident logs; and documents relating to attendance and safeguarding.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, the deputy headteacher and two teachers have left the school. The assistant headteacher has taken up the role of acting deputy headteacher and an existing teacher within the school has been promoted to acting assistant headteacher. Two teachers have been appointed to replace those that have left, one to a permanent position and one a temporary position. The school has recently appointed an additional assistant headteacher, who will take up post in September 2017.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

It is evident from this monitoring inspection that the pace of improvement has increased. Swift action has been taken by the headteacher to address staffing issues. Upon the departure of some staff, others have been promoted within school and new staff employed. Consequently, a stronger staff team is being established which has the capacity both to teach effectively and to make a significant contribution to school improvement. Staffing difficulties are not completely resolved, but the headteacher knows that unless they are, improvement cannot be sustained long term, the impact of training is diluted and embedding practice is short-lived. The headteacher and interim management board are resolved to establish a strong, permanent staff team for the start of the new academic year.

There is a growing sense that the school has shaken off the stigma and negative feelings around being placed in special measures. As a result, morale is lifting. The headteacher has grown in confidence and is taking a firm, assured lead in developments and building the school to success. He is very ably assisted by a newly formed senior leadership team, and together they are tackling the

improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and standards effectively. In some areas there are signs of innovation and creativity in addressing improvements. For example, the leadership activity, known as the 'Friday flick' is a regular weekly look at pupils' books. One book is selected randomly from each class. The headteacher and acting deputy have a quick but precise look at an aspect of teaching and learning, evaluate it and feed back to staff. The activity is completed within an hour. The impact is evident in books, which are now marked consistently across school: this clearly indicates a step change in expectations and the quality of learning that pupils are receiving.

Self-evaluation and school development planning has improved. The headteacher has worked hard to modify this documentation to ensure that there is a much deeper account of the intended and actual impact of actions. These documents are now more precise and are much more useful to senior leaders and the interim management board. They provide an accurate, concise picture of where the school is in terms of improvement and pupils' progress.

The interim management board is establishing itself as a strong team. Members are supportive and encouraging of the school, but equally challenging and demanding when needed. Their expectations are much higher and they make a valuable contribution to the new pace at which the school is working. However, they are honest and accurate in where they feel the school is and are well aware that they are only part way through their school improvement journey.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the last monitoring visit, outdoor provision across early years has been transformed. Resources have been spruced up and areas are clearly defined, attractive and inviting. Opportunities for children to mark-make and practise their number skills are built into all areas. Teachers have decided to continue their indoor theme outdoors, which has been responded to with delight by the children. For example, in Nursery, children eagerly search for wild animals, donning explorer hats and clutching torches to explore the bushes and trees for animals. In Reception, children have enjoyed den-building, deciding to make them waterproof when it started to rain. Children are visibly excited by the changes, which have resulted in an increase in the amount of language and chatter that children engage in with adults and each other. Adults report that they have been energised by the developments and motivated to do much more.

Teaching and learning across key stage 2 is improving; the serious concerns in lower key stage 2 have largely been addressed. Pupils are now getting a much better learning experience, although they lag behind in terms of progress because of past weak teaching. In upper key stage 2 the introduction of new strategies for teaching writing are ensuring that there is more rigour and higher expectations in this subject. In mathematics, pupils are being given increased opportunities to solve problems and more pupils are being challenged by the work they are offered. Key

stage 1 is not as strong and consistent in teaching and learning as it has been. This is due to the staffing changes that occurred earlier in the term. However, leaders are aware of this and are urgently seeking a remedy as a matter of priority.

A significant and much-needed improvement has occurred in the teaching of writing across the school. It was obvious from the previous monitoring visit that this area of the curriculum was in need of urgent attention. Leaders have rapidly and effectively implemented a structured whole-school approach to developing writing skills and written language development. As a result of leaders investing in intensive training for staff and effective monitoring of teaching and scrutiny of work, the teaching of writing has been transformed. Teachers are confident and use a good level of subject knowledge. It is evident from books that pupils are making swift progress. They have opportunities to improve their own work and are offered feedback to help them move on to the next step in their learning. Leaders are rightly pleased with the visible impact and have already identified the strengths and gaps of the approach. As a result, leaders are introducing greater opportunities for pupils to practise their writing skills within longer pieces of work.

The positive development of reading and phonics has been maintained. There is a consistent approach throughout school from early years onwards. Consequently, pupils are successfully building in their skills and knowledge as they go through school. Teaching assistants are making a valuable contribution to pupils' skill development because of their phonics knowledge and growing confidence in delivery. Leaders are presently reviewing the way that group reading activities are taught and how pupils can be better supported to deepen their understanding of what they are reading.

The teaching of mathematics throughout school is still underdeveloped. A number of staff lack confidence in delivering the new approach that has been adopted by the school and consequently are not always able to support pupils in their learning effectively. Some teachers do not use questioning to draw out learning and challenge pupils thinking. Leaders have plans in place to focus intensively on this subject area, including further intensive training for staff and opportunities for additional support and coaching. It is intended that the implementation of mathematics will emulate the successful approach taken in writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Attendance in school continues to be above the national average. There has been a noteworthy reduction in the number of pupils who are persistently absent, which has halved compared to the same time last year. There has been a similar drop in the number of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent. The school has turned its attention to pupils that are late for school and they have had success with the pupils and families that they have targeted. However, leaders recognise that there is a need to continue to address this area as there are still too many pupils missing the start of their lessons.

Behaviour and conduct around school continues to be positive. Pupils are keen to say 'hello' and are welcoming to visitors. Pupils' attitude to their learning in lower key stage 2 has improved markedly, they are now much keener to learn and disruptive behaviour has been eradicated. Occasionally in key stage 1, pupils can still be distracted and fidgety. Throughout the rest of school, pupils' attitude is positive and they are keen to engage in all that is offered to them. Pupils are taking pride in their work and like the increased opportunities they get to complete challenging activities. A few pupils are beginning to develop a sense of ownership in their learning. They are confident to question aspects of learning that they are not sure of or even appropriately challenge adults if they think they might be wrong. This increase in confidence among pupils hints at the potential of higher aspirations that the school is beginning to generate.

Leaders intend to review the pastoral and personal, social and emotional development side of school before the end of term. They recognise that with the changes in staff and the intensive focus on improving teaching and learning some aspects of this area of school may not be as strong as they were or could be. When talking to parents and pupils, some expressed that they did not always know whom to go to with a problem or worry. Pupils felt that they were not always listened to and a few pupils said to the inspector that 'teachers are really busy, we don't want to bother them'. They also expressed a view that they were not given many tasks or responsibilities to do around school or that they weren't sure what they could do if they had been given a role. For example, during the monitoring visit, a few pupils occasionally sat on the 'friendship' bench but no one came to see if they were alright or if they could help or play with them. The inspector spoke to a group of pupils who came up with lots of very good ideas about how the school could improve in this area.

Outcomes for pupils

Assessment information is being gathered regularly and analysed in detail by leaders and the interim management board. Moderation activities both within school and with others indicate that the information gathered is accurate and gives a realistic picture of the progress that pupils make across the school. The information indicates that progress in Years 4 and 3 is poor and still requires rapid improvement. This is because of the weak or inconsistent teaching of the past. Elsewhere the pace of pupil's progress is better and improving.

Children in early years, who start school with skills and knowledge below the level of children of a similar age, are on track to be close to last year's national averages in achieving a good level of development and meeting the expected standard in phonics.

At the end of key stage 1 pupils are on track to achieve above last year's national average at expected and greater depth in all subjects. These results indicate that this year group have made strong progress through the year. At the end of key

stage 2, compared to previous years, in-year progress has improved, particularly in writing and grammar, spelling and punctuation. Better teaching and learning has resulted in pupils being on track to achieve comparably to last year's expected national averages in reading, writing and mathematics combined and reading separately. They are unlikely to reach comparable figures in writing, mathematics or grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, at higher standards pupils are likely to be above or comparable to last year's national averages in all subjects except grammar, spelling and punctuation. This is a positive indication of the greater levels of challenge being offered to pupils in lessons, including the most able.

The headteacher prepares a separate and detailed analysis of the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged. Overall, their progress mirrors that of the whole school, being weakest in Years 3 and 4 and strongest in Year 2. Reading continues to be a subject that disadvantaged pupils have made the most progress in across the school. This is due to the quality of the interventions offered to pupils to catch up in their reading. However, there are signs that the changes in approach and higher expectations in writing are beginning to make a difference to disadvantaged pupils, as their rates of progress have increased.

External support

The school continues to benefit from a range of external support. This is managed well by the headteacher and interim management board so that staff are not inundated with training and guidance, but what is provided is of a high quality and used thoughtfully and thoroughly. The appointed consultant headteacher works extremely well with senior leaders and has a very positive influence in supporting and offering wise words to leadership. She also contributes effectively to the monitoring of improvements in teaching and learning. The school has appreciated the support recently given to them by a phonics consultant. The school also works very effectively with another local school to develop mathematics. The trust continues to have a positive relationship with the local authority and has valued the support of advisers.