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23 June 2017

Miss Cathy Lowry
Interim headteacher
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Dear Miss Lowry

Special measures monitoring inspection of Priory Roman Catholic Primary School, Torquay

Following my visit to your school on 6–7 June 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 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 October 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 fit for purpose.

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 governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Plymouth, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Torbay. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve urgently the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - leaders monitoring teachers' assessment frequently and ensuring that it is accurate
 - widening the scope of evidence on the quality of teaching and the progress pupils are making by checking assessments against the work in pupils' work books
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge so that teaching for the new curriculum in writing and mathematics is effective and teachers accurately assess pupils' progress against expected standards
 - developing the leadership skills of middle leaders so that there is sufficient capacity in the leadership team for the school to make the rapid improvements it needs to make
 - sharpening the improvement plan with frequent milestones to check the impact of strategic decisions and actions against improvements in pupils' progress and attainment
 - ensuring that initiatives to improve the curriculum and raise standards are fully understood and have a rapid impact on outcomes for all groups of pupils
 - ensuring that leaders give governors accurate information about the quality of teaching and pupils' progress in a clear and consistent format so that impact can be more easily and rapidly assessed
 - governors developing a plan for monitoring the school's work against its strategic priorities to inform decision-making, particularly about the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils
 - regularly reviewing all risk assessments, including those for the after-school childcare.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is good or better, by teachers:
 - having consistent and high expectations of pupils' achievement and presentation of their work, so that pupils have more pride in their work and their successes
 - consistently applying the behaviour policy in all lessons so that any inappropriate behaviour is eradicated
 - making decisions about what pupils know and can do by using evidence from pupils' work matched against the national curriculum expectations as well as the information from tests
 - planning lessons that are based on assessment over time and on the evaluation of pupils' understanding
 - engaging pupils' interest and enthusiasm by checking to see whether pupils are ready to move on and intervening if they do not understand the work
 - ensuring that the targets pupils are given are based on their next steps in

learning, are understood by the pupils and are checked and changed as necessary.

- Accelerating the progress that pupils make in English and mathematics, particularly the progress of those pupils who are disadvantaged, most able or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities by:
 - rapidly closing gaps in pupils’ arithmetical knowledge and developing pupils’ ability to reason mathematically and apply their mathematical skills to solve problems
 - developing the accuracy of pupils’ writing by overcoming weaknesses in spelling and punctuation and handwriting
 - ensuring that all teaching of writing, including the new writing and phonics programme, is pitched at moving pupils rapidly to the expected standard of writing for their age
 - providing consistent challenge for the most able pupils in mathematics and writing which will enable them to reach the high standards of which they are capable
 - ensuring that the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are understood and planned for by teachers in all lessons so these pupils can apply and build on the skills they learn in supported programmes
 - checking frequently that the use of additional funding is enabling disadvantaged pupils to make accelerated progress and reach much higher standards.

- Improve the quality of leadership in the early years by:
 - leaders checking more frequently that the assessments made by all staff in the setting are accurate so that children’s needs are more clearly understood and quickly planned for.

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.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the interim headteacher, other leaders and managers, groups of pupils, representatives of the governing body and the trust's area adviser. There was also a telephone discussion with the interim chief executive officer of Plymouth Catholic Schools' Trust (CAST).

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been changes to the governance which include the appointment of a new chair of the governing body. The school have three temporary teachers until the end of the academic year. A new teaching appointment has been made which will also take responsibility for subject leadership in English from September 2017. All teachers, including the newly qualified teachers appointed before the last inspection, are being supported by the Shiphay Learning Academy. A national leader of education (NLE) is working with the school to help it improve the quality of education it provides.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You and your senior leaders are using the full range of evidence available to check the quality of teaching and learning. This is particularly helpful in identifying weaknesses. You then use this information to have immediate conversations with teachers to hold them to account. Wider scrutiny of pupils' work is also enabling you to have a more accurate view of pupils' learning and the progress they are making. However, your work scrutiny does not yet focus closely enough on the particular skills, knowledge and understanding in writing and mathematics to have the greatest impact.

Since February 2017, you have established an effective partnership with an NLE to set about improving the quality of teaching and learning. Although this took time to initiate and implement, it is proving to be effective, especially for newly qualified teachers who are benefiting well from this support in improving provision and teaching in the early years foundation stage. The tailored one-to-one coaching opportunities, which include off-site observations, for every teacher as part of the school's work with Shiphay are supporting permanent teachers to improve. As a result, the school now has a small but significant number of teachers with emerging strengths to build on. Furthermore, other professional development opportunities for teachers are starting to show impact in the pupils' work. For example, a review of writing in January 2017 led to training which has subsequently provided a clear model to support the teaching of writing. However, much of this is still recent and is compromised by the high number of changes to the teaching staff, which directly affects the quality of teaching and learning. The uncertainty around staffing arrangements, including the lack of clarity about a substantive headship post for the

school, means that the morale and confidence of leaders to build for the future is being limited. It is imperative that leaders and managers of the school and the trust take immediate action to secure high-quality appointments to the school's staff.

Since the previous inspection, governors have commissioned a review of the spending and impact of the school's pupil premium grant. This took place in March 2017 and showed that governors are now taking appropriate action to begin to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. However, a detailed workbook scrutiny conducted during the inspection showed that leaders still need to focus more on the rates of pupils' progress over time to raise the low attainment of disadvantaged pupils across the school.

There has also been a review of governance, in February 2017. As a result, governors have modified their ways of working and have revised their structure to ensure they undertake the full range of their business and duties appropriately. There have been subsequent visits to school, for example to review key aspects of the school's safeguarding arrangements. Governors are galvanised and show an appetite to improve the school. However, the governors' action plan does not yet provide sufficient detail on how they will monitor the key priorities for improvement. Governors do not yet focus in enough detail on improvements to writing and mathematics, as well as addressing the instability in current staffing arrangements. In addition, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body have not received training to support them in their particular roles and responsibilities. They need this training as a matter of urgency.

The school development plan is fit for purpose and reflects the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. It sets out key training and monitoring activities to improve teaching and learning. However, it lacks clear milestones and measures that governors can use to hold leaders clearly to account. Governors' actions and monitoring are not linked to the school development plan, particularly in tackling those key priorities for improvement outlined above.

The statement of action is fit for purpose although, as with the school development plan, it lacks necessary detail to support governors in understanding and using clear milestones and measures to hold senior leaders to account.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Since the previous inspection, a range of strategies and actions have been introduced to start improving the quality of teaching across the school. As well as the targeted support through Shiphay, teachers are now using structures and systems to build pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in English and mathematics. For example, the agreed approach to the teaching sequence of writing is supporting pupils in gaining confidence and improving their writing skills, although this is more marked in some year groups than in others. Teachers are now gaining an understanding of the national expectations in reading, writing and

mathematics. This is starting to raise the expectations of the pupils and what they can achieve. However, teachers do not always ensure that work is well planned to build the progression of pupils' skills in working towards the new standards, especially for those who have special educational needs and the disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders have introduced a range of activities to support pupils who are behind to start catching up. These include additional interventions and 'pre-teaching' sessions as well as 'early morning' work and targeted phonics to fill gaps in pupils' knowledge. These are now beginning to have a positive impact. However, there are continuing issues in ensuring the consistency and quality of the work in these additional sessions because staff subject knowledge is too variable. For example, a misconception about fractions taught during an additional (pre-teaching) session had failed to be appropriately identified and addressed.

Staff subject knowledge is not yet consistently strong to be able to intervene and adapt learning in lessons successfully. This is most noticeable in mathematics, where adults do not know the next steps to build pupils' number skills or to tackle weaknesses, for example in working with fractions. This slows the rates of pupils' progress and means that pupils do not build seamlessly on prior knowledge. On the other hand, teaching assistants are well deployed to support pupils in the daily phonics sessions. They are knowledgeable and have been trained to lead small groups, which is starting to improve pupils' recognition and application of age-appropriate letters and sounds, particularly in key stage 1. However, the organisation and structure of these daily sessions can lead to disruptive behaviour and generally an environment which is not wholly conducive to learning.

The support for the newly qualified teachers has been particularly effective. This is securing a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and provision, especially in the Reception Year. Assessments in the early years foundation stage are used accurately to support teaching and learning. However, a scrutiny of work also showed that assessment information in other year groups needs to be moderated to ensure accuracy across the school. This is particularly urgent in securing the right judgements for pupils at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Behaviour in lessons is improving because of the consistent application and use of the school's behaviour management policy. This is under continual review to ensure that pupils' behavioural needs are being met. Pupils fully understand the 'three steps' rule of the policy. These are used to support pupils to evaluate and manage their own behaviour. Staff use and apply the policy consistently, which helps the pupils to know when their behaviour is escalating and causing a distraction to themselves and others. As a result recorded incidents of disruptive behaviour in lessons are declining rapidly, especially since the start of this academic year. You

and your staff firmly support and challenge pupils' behaviour through clear expectations so that previous chaotic and disorderly episodes are being eradicated. However, there are some year groups and cohorts which remain more vulnerable to the effects of poor behaviour. You are targeting resources appropriately to support pupils, for example in establishing a 'nurture group' to provide additional pastoral care and support for a few identified pupils. This is having the wider benefit of stabilising behaviour and learning for other pupils in key stage 1.

Across the school, pupils are beginning to be involved in taking responsibility for choosing the right level of challenge in their learning, for example through 'chilli challenges'. This is supporting pupils in becoming independent and to show more choice in their decision-making. Pupils like having this flexibility and are well supported in selecting the appropriate level of work for them.

Safeguarding is effective. Since the previous inspection school leaders, including governors, are maintaining a culture of awareness and vigilance to look after the children. Leaders are working closely with the range of external services to ensure that pupils attend school. You deploy school staff, such as the attendance officer and family support worker, to provide targeted support for pupils and their families. Staff and volunteers are well trained in child protection procedures. They know what to do to respond to pupils appropriately and swiftly to keep children safe.

Appropriate risk assessments, particularly for those in the breakfast and after-school club, are now fully in place. This was an area for improvement from the previous section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Following published 2016 results, the school is likely to double the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2. Evidence in Year 6 workbooks and assessment information shows that significantly more pupils are now working at the expected standard in writing and mathematics. However, rates of progress for different groups, particularly pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils, remain variable depending on the quality of teaching. There are examples of strong progress to catch up, for example in Years 4 and 6, but this is not yet consistent. Consequently, attainment remains low in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. In addition, there are still too few of the most able pupils meeting the higher standards expected of them.

A joint scrutiny of workbooks and visits to lessons identified key skills in writing that are not yet being secured quickly enough. While there are positive signs of improvement, pupils typically lack knowledge and confidence in basic sentence formation, including knowing how to punctuate sentences and organise their writing. This prevents pupils from drafting and composing writing with fluency or to convey meaning effectively. In terms of spelling, pupils are being taught letters and

sounds with an effective structure. They are gaining improving knowledge of age-appropriate content, especially in key stage 1. This year leaders are expecting a slight increase towards the national average of Year 1 pupils meeting the standard in the phonics screening check. However, evidence in pupils' workbooks shows that pupils still find it difficult to apply these skills consistently when writing on their own.

A scrutiny of pupils' workbooks in mathematics as well as an analysis of workbooks across the school in lessons showed that pupils lack a secure understanding of basic number skills to be able to use and apply them effectively in different situations. Teaching does not embed a clear progression of number skills and other related mathematical concepts, such as fractions and decimals. As a result, pupils find it difficult to use and apply their knowledge, or to problem-solve effectively. As part of the inspection, leaders recognised that building pupils' fluency and conceptual understanding of number sense and reasoning are critical to raising standards.

The proportion of children expected to meet the national expectations at the end of the Reception Year (good level of development) is likely to decline in 2017. However, the children are now making at least typical progress from their starting points. Sampling of individual children's assessment information held by the school showed that the class teacher has established accurate assessment. This is being used to plan appropriate next steps for the children and tailor work to meet their needs, including for disadvantaged pupils. However, there is still a need to ensure that children can gain some key skills more quickly, for example adding and subtracting two single-digit numbers and being able to use the environment more extensively to communicate their thoughts and feelings using the spoken and written word.

External support

High-quality support provided by the NLE and Shiphay Learning Academy is having a positive impact on school improvement. The headteacher is working effectively with the NLE to merge other external support for the school, for example in using the advice from the school's purchased literacy adviser and blending this with ongoing professional support through Shiphay. However, as reported previously, support through the trust in managing staffing arrangements and the long-term insecurity of key leadership roles is limiting school improvement.