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14 July 2017

Mrs Catherine Mallard  
St Begh's Catholic Junior School  
Coach Road  
Whitehaven  
Cumbria  
CA28 7TE

Dear Mrs Mallard

### **Special measures monitoring inspection, St Begh's Catholic Junior School**

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 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 June 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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement 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 regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cumbria. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Hughes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in June 2016.**

- With urgency, ensure that:
  - staff know the correct procedures to follow if they have concerns about the safety of a pupil or the behaviour of a member of staff
  - a complete, simple, single system is in place, enabling governors and leaders to know that all background checks have been made on adults working in the school.
- Improve the effectiveness of school leaders in increasing the rate of improvement in teaching and, consequently, in pupils' progress by:
  - improving the skills of staff and governors to accurately evaluate the impact of the work of the school on pupils' achievement
  - measuring the impact of the school's work using information about pupils' outcomes
  - ensuring that checks on the school's work are frequent enough to quickly identify slow improvement
  - ensuring that leaders' responses to any identified slow progress are more rapid.

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 28 and 29 June 2017**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work, and scrutinised a wide range of documentation, the latest external monitoring report and evidence of classroom monitoring. She met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the subject leaders for English and mathematics, as well as several other key teaching staff. In addition, discussions were held with pupils, six members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector also talked to a number of parents attending a parents' meeting on the second day of the inspection. The inspector visited each classroom to observe pupils at work to check their behaviour and to look at their books. All of the teaching observations were joint observations. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector completed a book scrutiny covering pupils' work in English, mathematics, science, religious education, history and geography.

### **Context**

Since the inspection in June 2016, St Begh's has continued to receive support from a national leader of education and there have been some staffing changes. There are new subject leaders in post. There are no firm plans in place for St Begh's to become an academy in the near future.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

- St Begh's is on the road to recovery. Staff are embracing change in order to do the best for the pupils. Leaders are keen to raise ambitions and drive further improvements. The comprehensive action plan has underpinned recent improvements and the foundations for further success are in place. No one is under any illusion that the improvement journey will be easy or swift. Essential management procedures, such as a fit-for-purpose assessment system and a clear understanding of what good teaching looks like at St Begh's, need agreement and time to embed. The constant changes to assessment procedures are having a detrimental effect on developing a plain understanding of what pupils know and can do.
- The shortcomings around safeguarding identified at the previous inspection have been fully addressed. There is a single, efficient system to ensure that recruitment checks have been completed. All staff now fully understand policies on how to protect children and know the correct procedures to follow if they have any concerns. Leaders and governors acted swiftly to improve the security of the site and school.
- School leaders are developing a more accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and the progress made by pupils. Leaders have developed closer links with feeder infant schools. As a result, leaders have a firmer picture of what

pupils know and can do when they start in Year 3.

- Leaders have a much more accurate understanding of how well the school is performing. Leaders' initial regular checks on teaching, plus their helpful advice and guidance, enabled teachers to know what they needed to do to improve their practice. However, these checks have slowed and there is no well-defined view of what good teaching and learning looks like at St Begh's. When leaders look at pupils' books, the quality of pupils' learning does not have a high enough priority.
- There is a much clearer focus on the impact of actions on pupils' achievements in reading, writing and mathematics. While this is leading to improvements in outcomes for pupils in these areas, work has not yet begun in other areas of the curriculum.
- An external review of governance, which took place in 2016, has helped to bring about some changes to the governing body. Structures have been reviewed and roles have been clarified. Governors are playing to their strengths and putting their expertise to good use. Governors visit school regularly to witness improvements for themselves and to gauge the views of staff and pupils. The governing body's own action plan identifies key monitoring activities which, if completed, will help to ensure that improvements are focused on pupils' achievements. However, some of this monitoring has not taken place within the agreed timescales and this is slowing progress.
- The school has begun to implement a plan to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils following a thorough external review. Spending has been reviewed and the strategies to support these pupils have been updated. Staff have a better understanding of their role in diminishing differences in achievement. This is paying dividends. Disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than has been the case in the past.
- While, initially, everyone was on board, more recent issues with teamwork are hampering the rate of progress. After an initial push from staff to move on quickly from the judgement, relationships between some key staff have broken down. As a result, much of the early impetus has been lost. Monitoring activities have slowed and the lack of teamwork and communication across school means that developments have been knocked off track. Good practice is not celebrated or replicated. There are plans in place to resolve this situation and put the school back on track from September.
- Parents are very pleased with the work of the school. They have noticed an improvement in site security, and feel that their children are safe and cared for well. Parents appreciate the good-quality information that they receive.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

- The work on helping teachers to understand how to use what pupils know and can do to plan lessons is helping to lift the rate of progress for pupils, including the most able and lower-attaining pupils. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the progress made by pupils between year groups

and subjects. Teaching is not yet consistently good, particularly in mathematics, and consequently too many pupils are not yet making sufficient progress.

- Although improving, pupils' learning falters when teachers do not explain new learning well enough. Teachers lack a clear understanding of some of the specific areas taught and, consequently, teaching sometimes lacks clarity.
- There are greater consistencies in teaching, learning and assessment within year groups. Teachers within year groups work together to develop their teaching. However, the impact of this is not felt across school. As a result of difficulties with teamwork, staff do not engage in professional dialogue to share what works well.
- Teachers are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour through warm and nurturing relationships. Teachers are providing greater opportunities for pupils to work together to discuss their ideas and to share their work.
- Subject leaders in reading, writing and mathematics have benefited from the additional training that they have received from the local authority. They have clear plans in place to improve pupils' outcomes. Leaders have placed a strong focus on staff training in these areas. The impact of this can be seen particularly in the improvements in pupils' writing.
- Pupils are being exposed to age-appropriate mathematical ideas, and problem solving is now a feature of teaching. Nonetheless, pupils are not developing as fluent mathematicians who can use their skills to solve a range of unfamiliar problems. This is because teachers place too much emphasis on written calculations. Sometimes this over reliance on written calculations means that opportunities to use more appropriate methods are missed.
- Improvements in some subjects other than English and mathematics have moved on. For example, in history, pupils are given exciting opportunities to learn and use historical enquiry to good effect. However, this is not consistent across other areas of topic work. Pupils in Year 6 experience a narrow curriculum, and there is little evidence of scientific enquiry in several year groups.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

- Procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe are now fit for purpose. Pupils say that they feel safe and are looked after well. Parents, too, feel that the school keeps their children safe. Almost all pupils say that they feel safe. They agree that their peers behave well and that adults sort out any minor misbehaviour quickly.
- Continuing developments elsewhere are positive. Pupils behave well and show high levels of respect to each other and adults. This is as a result of the positive relations established between adults and pupils. Pupils support each other very well with their work and help each other to find ways to improve.
- Pupils behave well and work hard. They rise to the challenges set by their teachers. For example, pupils rose to the challenge of presenting data in different ways in order to make it meaningful for other people. They persevered with the

task and asked for extra help when it became particularly difficult. Pupils want to learn, and there is very little disruption in lessons. However, at times, pupils demonstrate a lack of care over their work which is not picked up on by adults.

- Attendance remains variable, but is around national averages.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

- There are promising signs of pupils making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, this continues to be too variable to be considered good.
- Disadvantaged pupils are benefiting most from the recent changes. The difference in attainment between these pupils and their peers is beginning to diminish. In contrast, too little attention is being paid to the most able pupils to ensure that they fulfil their potential, particularly in mathematics.
- The school's own data shows some shortfalls in pupils' current attainment in some year groups and some subjects. Subject leaders in subjects other than English and mathematics have yet to develop a coherent view of pupils' knowledge and understanding in their subjects.
- There are encouraging signs of pupils making stronger progress in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Teachers routinely include this work in all areas of English teaching, and work in pupils' books shows that pupils are beginning to use this in their own writing.
- In Year 3 and Year 4, pupils make good progress in writing from their different starting points. However, pupils' progress in writing in Year 5 and Year 6 varies. In Years 5 and 6 the most able and middle-attaining pupils make good progress in writing due to the systematic planning of this work. Lower-attaining pupils do not benefit from the same consistent approach and, as a consequence, their progress is not as good.
- Pupils across the school make good progress in written calculations. However, too many are unable to rely on their quick recall of number patterns to help them to solve problems. Although the progress that pupils make in Year 6 in mathematics has improved, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 are given too few opportunities to investigate numbers and explain their reasoning. This hampers the progress of the most able pupils towards reaching the higher standards. Despite their gains this year, too few pupils in Year 6 are likely to start secondary school with the skills and knowledge that they need in mathematics.

### **External support**

- The local authority is delivering its planned actions effectively to support the school during this challenging period. Officers from the local authority are keeping abreast of the school's progress. They are meeting with leaders frequently, attending meetings of the governing body and offering support to improve teaching. Their support and challenge are welcomed and valued by school leaders.

- The external support provided by a national leader of education is helping to support improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. This support is beginning to bear fruit.
- The school continues to receive extensive local authority consultant support, especially for English and mathematics. This has been particularly important in ensuring that the subject leads continue to focus on pupils' outcomes.