

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



24 July 2017

Mrs Demelza Bolton
St Mary's Catholic School
Peeverell Road
Penzance
Cornwall
TR18 2AT

Dear Mrs Bolton

**Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's Catholic School,
Penzance**

Following my visit with Sally Olford, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 11–12 July 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 academy'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.

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 executive board, the director of the board of trustees at Plymouth CAST, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and are used rigorously to check that pupils are on track to make at least good progress
 - leaders' plans for improvement are sharply focused on priorities and show the steps which must be taken to improve the school's effectiveness and the impact these actions will have on raising pupils' outcomes
 - middle leaders monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility so that they can contribute strongly to improvement
 - the newly formed governing body has sufficient and accurate information to provide robust challenge for senior leaders
 - teaching is effective in meeting the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve and improve pupils' progress, particularly for the most able pupils in reading and writing
 - accurately understand what pupils can and cannot do and use this knowledge to eradicate any gaps in learning
 - increase their subject knowledge in English so that they can plan the next steps in pupils' learning effectively, particularly for the most able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - in the early years use the assessment information to plan for the needs of all groups of children to be fully met.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how to improve this aspect of leadership and management.

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 11 July 2017 to 12 July 2017

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, two groups of pupils from key stage 2 and two members of the interim executive board, including the chair. An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from Plymouth CAST and met with some parents while dropping their children off at school in the morning. Inspectors observed learning in every class, looked at work in pupils' books with senior and middle leaders and spoke informally with a number of pupils at break and lunchtimes to gain their views of the school. A range of documentary evidence was examined, including the school's plans for improvement and minutes of interim executive board meetings.

Context

Since the time of the inspection a number of changes have occurred at the school. An interim executive board replaced the governing body in November 2016. New posts have been created to lead on areas of responsibility for assessment, English, the most able, pupil premium funding and to support pupils who have English as an additional language. One teacher has left the school, a further teacher joined and two new assistants have joined the nursery team. The special needs coordinator, who is also the assistant headteacher, is now non-class-based. The number on roll at the school is increasing.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Your approach to improve the quality of education for all in the school community is touching many aspects of the school's work. Your commitment and dedication to bringing about the necessary improvements to the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement, leadership and management are raising the performance of all. Senior leaders, working closely alongside you, are responding to the many changes and increased expectation with willingness and enthusiasm. Most importantly, you are providing clear guidance as a role model of best practice, drawing on your previous experience, which others can emulate and raise their own performance. Staff morale is high because all are receiving clear direction and purpose and they understand the role they play in driving improvements. All who met with inspectors felt well supported, valued, and acknowledged even the small changes such as the 'thank you' or 'well done' comments they receive.

The impact of your work is evident in the developing impact of middle leaders, who are playing an increasingly important role in driving improvements. They are undertaking a broader range of monitoring activities and increasingly using the findings to plan the next steps of improvement in their areas of responsibility. Currently, monitoring reports contain some broad-brush evaluations of pupils'

learning but lack the greater precision and detail required to check precisely on the impact of actions on groups of pupils' learning.

Judgements made on the performance of pupils are accurate and rigorously checked by members of the interim executive board. External checks by representatives of the local authority also confirm the accuracy of teachers' work across the school. The use of assessment information from fixed points in time, usually on a half-termly basis, is being used by leaders effectively to devise actions for the next stage in the school's development. The resulting plans are comprehensive, thorough and detailed, but now require streamlining to ensure that all can prioritise the precise improvements needed.

The recent changes to leadership and governance have undoubtedly left your school in a much stronger position than at the time of the last full inspection. You now have the right people, in the right position. You and your new team are establishing the firm foundations to move forward confidently in pursuit of full consistency in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. All those spoken to during the inspection understand that, above all else, everyone must now maintain the momentum and rigour shown in the last two terms to ensure that the new ways of working that you have introduced have maximum impact over time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are rising. A new approach to matching activities to pupils' learning needs from the outset of lessons is proving successful and ensuring that no learning time is lost. Many of the most able pupils report they enjoy the increased challenge in lessons to either 'shine, sparkle and dazzle' or 'were dazzling today'. Pupils are also responding positively to the clarified reward system. They particularly welcome the raffle awards, golden beads and especially the 'wow days' that bring learning and topics to life.

Teachers check what pupils can or cannot do accurately at fixed points in time. This typically occurs at the end of a unit of work or on a half-termly basis. Information is used to plan for pupils' next steps in learning. Teachers are not routinely using the assessment information gleaned during lessons to adapt learning, check misconceptions or move pupils on in their learning. At times, feedback provided does follow the school's agreed procedure of helping pupils to know what they have done well and what they need to improve next in relation to the learning objective.

Overall, teaching assistants are playing a greater part in classroom learning and around the school. The best are proactive in lessons, seeing what needs to be organised and delivering activities that support pupils' learning well. Tailored pastoral care for those pupils who need additional support is helping them to overcome emotional barriers to learning well. However, at other times some adults

do not support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well enough during day-to-day activities. In these instances pupils lack the skills to be able to work things out by themselves and become too reliant on adult support. This hinders their better progress and means that the performance of this group is still too variable.

The teaching of writing is being enhanced by a framework that makes clear to staff how pupils' skills are to develop from year to year. For example, teachers know how pupils' report-writing should progress as they become more skilled at this genre. When this is coupled with more exciting opportunities to write and a focus on getting the technical aspects of composition correct, pupils make swifter progress in their writing. This was seen, for example, in pupils' work to undertake character studies when reading Rudyard Kipling's 'The Jungle Book'.

Teachers' subject knowledge to plan for requirements of the national curriculum in mathematics is not yet secure. Across the school, concepts are not developed sufficiently well for pupils to be well prepared for the new, raised expectations. Topics jump from one area of mathematics to another and are presented as a 'piecemeal' approach. At times, pupils repeat work and do activities that do not develop their deeper problem-solving or reasoning skills. As a result, improvements in mathematics are slower than in reading or writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are typically engaging, talkative, open and honest about their learning. They are polite to one another and adults and take great pride in their contribution to the ongoing developments at the school. During lessons they work well together, support each other and are encouraging of those who may need extra help or guidance. Pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning are having a positive impact on their improving achievement.

Pupils welcome the many changes that are occurring at the school. They are particularly positive about your work as headteacher and the way you conduct yourself in a 'kind, fair and real' manner. Many pupils spoken to were keen to show inspectors the improvement to their school, including the 'root and branch' overhaul of reading areas, displays and the library. All those who met with inspectors talked with confidence and assurance about the work the school is undertaking to help them live out the virtues the school wishes to promote. Pupils understand that their approach, for example to caring, is not just something to talk about, but actually needs to be evident in the way they act, behave and treat one another. Pupils feel safe, secure and happy that adults support and help them if they have any concerns.

Outcomes for pupils

At the time of the last full inspection, pupils' attainment and progress in reading,

writing and mathematics were well below what is normally expected. Since that time, the rate of pupils' progress for most groups of pupils has increased. Standards are therefore rising and many pupils are catching up or have caught up on previous underachievement. This represents a significant improvement on pupils' previous performance and is most evident where more-consistent teaching, aligned with strong leadership, is reaping benefits.

The success of your collective actions is typified by the improvements to the standards achieved by Year 6 in reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Provisional results for the 2017 national tests indicate the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined has improved to the national average. In addition, a larger proportion of pupils across the school are being stretched to reach the higher standards, or greater depth, of which they are capable.

Effective use of interesting texts such as 'The Mysteries of Hans Burdick', containing challenging subject matter, is capturing pupils' interests and helping to speed up their progress. As a result, the gaps between the performance of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged and their peers, is beginning to close in many year groups. School leaders and class teachers are aware that pupils' weaker progress, evident in Years 1 and 3, will need to be resolved as a matter of urgency in the autumn term.

Improvements to the teaching of reading are having a good impact on pupils' achievement. By promoting reading throughout the school environment, in reading corners, displays and through online homework, leaders are exciting pupils about the possibilities that reading can bring. Pupils are very positive about the changes being made and read with enthusiasm and passion. Training on the teaching of phonics is also proving successful. Outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check are above the national average for all pupils in 2017.

External support

The findings of a review of governance have been used to appoint a new board of governors at the school. Members of the interim executive board are using their expertise and specialist knowledge to strengthen the overall leadership at the school effectively. They also bring much-needed stability and they recognise problems quickly and support the headteacher in addressing them strongly. Interim board members are highly committed and determined for the school to succeed. Joint activities with school staff and comprehensive reviews of the impact of actions taken provide them with an accurate picture of the improvements occurring at the school. The interim executive board is well placed to make informed decisions about the future of the school, including assuring its financial security.

Interim board members are ensuring that the school's leadership is building sufficient capacity to bring about the necessary improvements. A review of the use

of pupil premium funding has been used to refocus teaching on successfully closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Training on monitoring and analysing school performance data is enabling middle leaders to contribute more strongly to school improvement.

Support and guidance for staff working in the early years are improving the quality of leadership, the curriculum, quality of teaching and assessment in this important area of the school's work. Topics such as the sea shore are sparking children's curiosity and stimulating them to write questions such as: 'Did you know a seahorse has a tail?' The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Reception in 2017 improved and was above the national average.