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Miss Cathy Lowry
Interim Headteacher
Priory Roman Catholic Primary School
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Dear Miss Lowry

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

Following my visit with Anthony Epps, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 29–30 November 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 October 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 not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. However, it should be reduced and simplified in order to urgently tackle persistent weaknesses in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Having considered all the evidence I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim academy board, 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.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 29–30 November 2017

Evidence

An inspector met with the interim headteacher, subject leaders for mathematics and English, and a group of key stage 2 pupils to evaluate progress since the previous visit. In addition, inspectors visited lessons with the headteacher and analysed the work in pupils' mathematics, English and topic books for different groups of pupils. Inspectors also held discussions with the head of school improvement, the school improvement partner from the multi-academy trust and the previous chair of the governing body. An inspector also sampled the views of parents.

Context

Since the previous visit, there have been recent and significant changes to the leadership of the school. Those responsible for running the trust (Plymouth Catholic Anglican Schools' Trust or CAST) have taken the decision to remove the governing body. There have also been further changes to the teaching staff with four new teachers starting or returning since September 2017. One of these recent appointments is also the new English subject leader.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been significant and very recent changes to the delegation of those responsible for running the school. Trustees and directors of the trust have removed the governing body and replaced it with an interim academy board (IAB). The removal of the governing body has only recently taken effect with the chair of the governing body being informed the day before the inspection. There is a palpable tension and relationships in the school, as well as with other stakeholders, are strained. Discordant relationships between parties have become a distraction and contributed directly to slowing improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Governors had started to take action to improve their knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. This included coaching for strategic development, and training for the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. They were starting to ask questions of leaders to increase the level of challenge within the school. However, the rate of improvement in teaching and learning remained too slow. Further inadequate and weak teaching in the school has been identified since September 2017. Therefore, the trust has taken the decision to intervene directly and introduce the IAB with immediate effect. However, all of this has caused an interruption in the school's journey towards the removal of special measures. Given how recently the IAB has been in place, there is not yet any impact or proven track record of its effectiveness. The remit and jurisdiction of the IAB have been confirmed, including delegation of collective and individual responsibilities. However, there are ongoing discussions to confirm all members to complete the IAB.

Those responsible for improving English and mathematics are not having enough impact to rapidly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across year groups. There are pockets of emerging strengths and good practice, most notably in the classes of the mathematics and English subject leaders themselves. However, these lack consistency so that too much teaching remains poor. Recent changes and adjustments in teaching have also had an unsettling impact. However, the efforts of the newly appointed English subject leader are leading to some positive impact. For example, teachers are now using high-quality texts in all classes to inspire and support pupils' writing. The mathematics subject leader is embracing the role and is highly motivated. She is providing essential coaching and support to other teachers, which is helping their understanding of how to model and present key mathematical concepts to the pupils.

Leaders' systems for checking pupils' progress are not sufficiently focused on accelerating pupils' progress or 'adding value' from previous starting points. For example, leaders check progress and hold face-to-face meetings with teachers to identify those pupils who are vulnerable to not meeting age-related expectations. Furthermore, appraisal of teachers includes clear reference to improvement priorities and pupils' outcomes. However, these do not consistently hold others to account for demanding the more accelerated progress that many of the pupils need to catch up with their peers. Consequently, attainment remains too low and pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, do not reach the standards of which they are capable. However, during the inspection, the mathematics subject leader already set about revising how she reviews pupils' progress. As a result, she was able to identify pupils who need urgent attention, including some of the most able pupils.

Other leaders, including those responsible for improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are not taking effective action to improve the academic outcomes for pupils well enough. Strategies for checking pupils' progress, including those who have individual plans, are not sufficiently robust. As a result, pupils who are often vulnerable to underachievement are not making sufficient progress. However, there are a few pupils who have been well targeted through the nurture group where tailored and well-targeted teaching is meeting the pupils' needs.

In October 2017, there was a serious breach in the school's processes for caring for pupils after school. This was not trivialised or underestimated by leaders of the school or trust. They took immediate action to review and improve systems and processes for after-school clubs. The trust is using its internal processes to conduct an appropriately thorough and robust investigation which is ongoing. In all other ways, pupils in the school say that they feel safe. Staff are appropriately checked, vetted and trained so that they can work safely with pupils. The headteacher works in close communication and liaises with other external agencies to refer concerns or take advice to help vulnerable pupils and their families.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to be weak. Further identification of inadequate teaching and slow rates of improvement do not support pupils well enough. Teachers lack confidence and skills in using formative assessment to build on what pupils already know, understand and can do. This is particularly evident in mathematics where sequences of learning 'jump', especially in pupils' number skills and their understanding and use of the four operations (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication). Teachers do not ensure that pupils use and apply their knowledge well enough in a range of situations. As a result, pupils continue to have limited ability in problem-solving or using and applying their knowledge to a range of situations.

Teachers often set a confusing assortment of different daily objectives that do not correspond to meet the particular needs of pupils in their writing, especially for lower-attaining pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. This means that pupils are unable to concentrate on the key areas that they need to improve, which slows their progress. The most able pupils are not consistently well challenged to deepen and apply their learning across subjects. This is seen, for example, in the lack of quality and depth of writing in topic books.

Teachers do not match work well enough to the different needs of pupils. They do not have high enough expectations so that, all too often, the quality, accuracy and presentation in pupils' workbooks are not good enough.

Teachers have been focusing on improving pupils' ability and confidence to justify and explain their reasoning. Teachers are becoming increasingly aware of exploring and probing pupils' thinking in lessons. They invite pupils to talk together and share their ideas. As a result, pupils are starting to take more ownership of their learning and enjoy being able to listen, help and respond to each other. In particular, children in the Reception Year are well supported to interact purposefully. The quality of teaching and provision in the early years is improving at a faster rate than elsewhere in the school. The children are being supported to gain independence through well-planned and considered activities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is not consistently good enough. This is something that pupils recognise and raised directly in discussion with an inspector. In particular, they object when other pupils talk over the teacher or distract one another in lessons. This occurs when teaching is not sufficiently interesting or challenging to hold the pupils' attention. School leaders have revised the behaviour policy and implemented a new system to raise expectations of pupils' behaviour, including in lessons. This is starting to help pupils to recognise when they are being constructive

or, conversely, when they need to correct their own behaviour to engage appropriately. In some lessons, pupils interact well and are supportive of each other. Pupils know what is expected of them and are showing an increasing awareness of what good learning behaviours are to help them succeed. However, pupils still do not take enough pride in their work, which is reflected in their workbooks, especially in topic and afternoon activities.

Leaders are working well to improve the attendance of pupils. Strategies aimed at working closely with families and regular checks by the school's attendance officer are impacting positively. The school's attendance is now marginally below the national average. In addition, the percentage of pupils who have persistently high absence is starting to fall, although it remains a challenge for school leaders. The attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and, in particular, disadvantaged pupils is not good enough compared with their non-disadvantaged counterparts nationally.

Leaders' use of the nurture provision in supporting pupils who have additional needs is working well. Pupils in this specialist provision benefit from tailored plans to help them to succeed socially, emotionally and academically. Leaders are clear that this is aimed at effective and timely reintegration for the pupils. Parents endorse this provision and are pleased with how it helps their children in a variety of ways. Work is focused to ensure progress in reading, writing and mathematics as well as delivering therapeutic intervention for pupils to support them with social and emotional difficulties.

Outcomes for pupils

End of key stage 2 results in the national tests for 2017 showed that pupils' attainment in combined reading, writing and mathematics rose from 26% in the previous year to 55%. In the same way, pupils' progress in writing improved strongly towards the national figure. However, pupils' progress in mathematics declined and is within the lowest 20% of schools. Outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 in reading, writing and mathematics were also weak. This continues a trend of poor achievement at the end of key stage 1 and means that pupils are not well prepared for the next stage in their learning. Gaps in pupils' knowledge are not closed quickly enough as they progress through key stage 2. In some year groups, pupils' weak outcomes and their low attainment are compounded by consecutive years of poor-quality teaching.

The current attainment of pupils in most year groups, especially in key stage 2, is low in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are not making enough progress to catch up, especially prior low- and middle-attaining pupils whose progress has stalled. In addition, too many of the disadvantaged pupils underachieve and are not being ably targeted and supported to gain ground.

Pupils' skills in number and calculation, and how they apply these, are weak. Work

in books shows that too many pupils are not able to use and manipulate numbers to solve problems in line with age-appropriate expectations. Pupils do not have a secure sense of number and related themes, such as place value, fractions and decimals. This holds them back as they move further through the mathematics curriculum. Furthermore, pupils are not adept at using or applying their skills and knowledge to make sense of problems or know how to tackle problems. Similarly in writing, pupils still do not show enough mastery of skills to compose high-quality and extended pieces of writing. Pupils are not developing the skills and resilience to write at length and depth in a variety of contexts.

The most able pupils are not consistently reaching the standards of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics. They do not use and apply skills in the full range of situations and subjects to deepen their knowledge and understanding. This includes other subjects such as science, history and geography. Work in these subjects lacks ambition for these pupils to be consistently well stretched or challenged. As a result, the most able pupils are not applying what they know to be able to deepen their understanding through complex tasks and challenges. They are not enabled to think differently to use the full range of their capabilities to be evaluative or analytical, or to apply their synthesis skills.

Leaders' strategy for teaching phonics is working well. This is reflected in the Year 1 phonics screening check results for 2017 which were in line with the national average. Pupils are targeted for daily practice which is appropriate and matched to the pupils' needs. Teachers and teaching assistants work well with small groups of pupils who have individualised programmes of work.

External support

The school is part of the Primary Writing Project to improve pupils' outcomes in writing. There is evidence of some impact but this has not had enough time to be seen consistently in all year groups. Leaders have also been successful in securing a bid to be part of the Strategic School Improvement Fund through funding from the Department for Education. This is particularly supporting disadvantaged pupils in Years 4 and 5 in mathematics. As part of this project, school staff receive additional support from a specialist leader in education. The impact of this is not yet consistently evident in pupils' workbooks and in their outcomes.

Since the support from Shiphay Learning Academy has formally ended, the trust is ensuring that a school improvement partner (SIP) is being deployed to the school for at least a day each week. This is enabling the SIP to coach staff and add additional support and challenge to the headteacher and other senior leaders. A teaching and learning review by the SIP has been instrumental in identifying further weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment which leaders are now responding to.