

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



27 February 2018

Mrs Susan Johnson
St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy
Benton Road
Ilford
Essex
IG1 4AS

Dear Mrs Johnson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy

Following my visit with Calvin Henry, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 31 January and 1 February 2018, 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 February 2017. 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 executive board, the director of education for the Diocese of Brentwood, the regional schools commissioner and the

director of children's services for Redbridge. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jean Thwaites
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in February 2017

- Ensure that as a matter of urgency governors and leaders make pupils' safety a top priority by:
 - making sure that all staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard pupils
 - taking immediate action to ensure that all the appropriate checks are completed for all staff and governors in the school
 - making sure that all the documents in the safer recruitment files meet statutory requirements
 - putting into place personal education plans for children who are looked after
 - ensuring that governors receive up-to-date training in preventing radicalisation and extremism.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders accurately assess the school's performance and prioritise actions to secure rapid improvement
 - making sure that the school's plans for improvement focus tightly on the progress of all groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils
 - securing accuracy in the assessments of pupils' learning to inform teaching in all year groups
 - making sure that teaching is consistently good or better across all year groups and in all subjects, including the early years
 - ensuring that leaders work effectively with external agencies, where appropriate, to support the most vulnerable pupils in the school.
- Ensure that governors provide effective challenge and support to leaders by holding them to account for their statutory responsibilities related to safeguarding, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes, including those of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve attendance rates for all pupils, particularly those eligible for free school meals, by analysing information regularly and putting into place effective actions to enable them to attend more regularly.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan activities that promote better progress, and raise their expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical

reasoning skills through problem solving

- reading is taught consistently across key stage 2 to develop pupils' inference and deduction skills.

■ Immediately improve the effectiveness of the early years provision, by ensuring that:

- children have a safe learning environment to learn and play and are well supervised when they move from one learning activity to another
- recruitment checks confirm that all adults are suitable to work with children
- adults effectively observe, plan and assess children's learning and development to ensure that they make rapid progress.

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 second monitoring inspection on 31 January and 1 February 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school and a senior leader. I also met with the chair of the interim executive board, and had separate telephone conversations with representatives from the diocese and the local authority. An inspector met with the literacy and mathematics leaders. A meeting was also held with the member of staff responsible for overseeing the checks relating to staff recruitment and for keeping children safe from harm. Inspectors met with and considered the views of a group of staff and a group of pupils. Inspectors, joined by senior leaders, observed pupils' learning in all classes. Examples of pupils' learning in their books were also looked at. A number of documents were reviewed, including records of your checks to safeguard children, and the school's own assessments of current pupils. Inspectors scrutinised the school's plans for improvement, your evaluation of the school's effectiveness, attendance information and documents relating to the work of the interim executive board. Inspectors gathered the views of parents at the start and end of the school day. Inspectors also heard pupils reading in lessons and spoke to pupils at lunchtime and at play.

This monitoring inspection focused on leadership and management; and teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Inspectors did not focus in detail on the other areas for improvement, although they were referred to during discussions with leaders and the chair of the interim executive board.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit the interim head of school has left. The deputy headteacher has taken on the role of head of school until the end of 2018. The recently appointed inclusion leader joins you and your head of school to make up the newly formed senior leadership team. Five teachers have joined the school on permanent contracts, significantly reducing the school's dependency on supply staff. Two agency staff have been secured until the end of the summer term to fill the remaining class teacher vacancies.

Discussions between the Diocese of Brentwood and the interim executive board around plans for the future of the school have progressed. Proposals have been submitted to the Department for Education for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Due to the ongoing support from external partners, senior leaders have managed to take important initial steps to remedy previous weaknesses. Leaders now have a more accurate picture of pupils' achievement across the school. Opportunities have been provided for staff to moderate their assessments of pupils' achievement in reading and writing and mathematics with other schools. There have been significant changes to the school's monitoring and assessment procedures. However, leaders have been overgenerous in their self-evaluation, and the proportion of pupils working at age-related expectations remains low.

A more systematic approach to gathering information on the quality of teaching and learning in classes is supporting the development of middle leaders. With support from external consultants, middle leaders are starting to monitor aspects of the school's performance, and have a developing awareness of what is working well and what needs further focus. This informs their planning for improvement. However, these plans lack focus on how they will develop a secure understanding among staff of what effective teaching and learning looks like in their areas of expertise.

Following the implementation of pupil progress meetings with class teachers, staff performance reviews now include clear, whole-school targets on pupil's outcomes. This is providing a platform to help senior leaders hold teachers and each other to account for the impact of their work.

Senior leaders have reviewed the school's action plan. The reviewed post-Ofsted action plan now includes well-considered, challenging, end-of-key-stage targets, specifying the proportions of pupils to be working at age-expectation and/or at greater depth by the end of the academic year.

The experienced early years leader from another local school who, for one day a week, was providing clear leadership support in the early years is no longer available. Leaders recognise that securing early years expertise is a priority, as judgements based on children's development are far too broad, and lack the precision to enable leaders to confidently track cohort progress.

Safeguarding remains a high priority at the school. The appropriate checks have been undertaken for all new appointments, and the single central record is complete. New starters' files are well-organised and contain up-to-date and detailed information, which meets statutory requirements. Governors and staff have recently undertaken training in preventing radicalisation and extremism.

Pupils' attendance remains strong. Since the last visit, leaders have implemented new systems to monitor the attendance of key groups and vulnerable pupils. These new systems are already making a difference. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has risen significantly, exceeding that of their peers, and is now above the national average for all schools.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has not yet taken place. However, a confirmed date has been set for 9 February 2018.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Due to the staffing changes since the October visit, many staff are new, or have taken on new areas of responsibility. As a result, leaders have not had enough time to make secure improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

However, the teaching of phonics and reading has been a priority. In the past, there was not a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. As a result, many pupils left Year 1 with weak phonics skills. Leaders have ensured that staff have received professional development to help them apply a uniform approach to teaching phonics. Subject knowledge is improving, and is particularly strong among support staff. A new phonics scheme is in place; all pupils in key stage 1 have been assessed and a phonics leader has been appointed.

Timetable changes now ensure regular reading slots for pupils daily. The recent implementation of reading journals and weekly spellings are valued by parents. Parents and pupils speak positively of the incentives, like the weekly raffle for pupils who have had their home-school reading record signed three or more times in a week. Pupils and parents agree that it is promoting regular reading at home. However, further training is required to ensure that teachers new to the school have the skills to teach phonics and advanced reading skills effectively.

In addition to reviewing the teaching of reading, with targeted support from external specialists, leaders have reviewed the teaching of writing and mathematics. This is already making a difference. Work scrutiny indicates that the work set for pupils matches their needs more closely. However, inconsistencies remain where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure.

The well-considered, recently implemented marking, feedback and assessment policy is providing clear guidance to staff. Consequently, teachers' assessments of writing at age-related expectations for their year group are broadly accurate. Further work is needed to secure a greater understanding of what working at greater depth looks like across the school. In mathematics, a consistent push to develop pupils' arithmetic skills is contributing to pupils' stronger gains in their learning. However, the development of pupils' reasoning skills is limited and remains an area of focus. Too few opportunities are provided for pupils to articulate their understanding and demonstrate their problem-solving skills.

Overall, the learning in pupils' books shows variability. The quality of learning across the school remains inconsistent. Despite this, the effectiveness of induction for new staff and the impact of the reviewed behaviour policy are evident across the school. During the visit, behaviour across the classes was strong. Pupils are respectful to each other. All teachers, including those recently appointed, have built positive

working relationships with pupils. Pupils move around the school in an orderly way. Breaktimes and playtimes are well supervised. Pupils have opportunities to use the wide range of equipment that parents told inspectors had been recently donated by St Aidan's Friends' Association.

External support

You are positive about the regular and robust challenge which members of the interim executive board provide as you tackle the many areas which needed attention this and last term. The decision to engage external partners to check the accuracy of your revised assessments of pupils' achievement has been particularly significant in securing a clearer picture of current pupils' attainment across the school.