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Mrs Lisa Fahy
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fahy

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sacred Heart Catholic School

Following my visit to your school on 18 and 19 September 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 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 May 2017.

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 action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Cameron
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - improving governors' ability to challenge leaders and hold them to account for the improvements that are needed
 - ensuring that leaders effectively evaluate the progress of all groups of pupils, especially the most able, so that staff are held to account for pupils' outcomes
 - improving the checks made on the quality of teaching to ensure that it is strong enough to help pupils make good progress from their starting points
 - ensuring that assessment information gathered is clear and purposeful and informs leaders' planning.
- Improve outcomes so that pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring that:
 - the pupil premium grant is spent effectively to allow disadvantaged pupils to make rapid progress
 - the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are sufficiently stretched and reach the highest standards.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information accurately to plan lessons that are well matched to pupils' needs, particularly the most able pupils
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use and explain their reasoning linked to how they solve mathematical problems
 - ensuring that all teachers have the highest expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially in mathematics and for the most able in all subjects.

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 first monitoring inspection on 18 to 19 September 2018

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the leader for mathematics, the chair and members of the interim executive board (IEB), a representative of the local authority and the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham. In addition, the inspector spoke with parents at the beginning of the school day and spoke to pupils informally during the inspection.

The inspector observed teaching and looked at pupils' books with senior leaders. A range of documents were considered including the school's improvement plans, the local authority statement of action, notes of visits from external partners, the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium, records of the checks on the quality of teaching, and the school's current information about pupils' progress and attainment. The single central record of checks made on staff was also reviewed.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in May 2017, one new teacher has been appointed, one teacher is on long term absence and one teacher is on maternity leave. Supply teachers and senior staff cover staff absences. In the summer term 2018, three new middle leaders were appointed with responsibilities for key stage 1, key stage 2 and mathematics respectively.

In November 2017, the governing body was replaced with an IEB so the external review of governance recommended at the last inspection was not necessary.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Members of the IEB have high expectations. Since their appointment in November 2017, leaders have been held to account with increased rigour and challenge. The IEB ensures that improvements in the school are rapid and can be sustained. Members monitor the school's progress through specific targets, accountability measures and milestones. The IEB is clear about the information it expects from school leaders so that it can evaluate the impact of leaders' actions effectively. The monitoring and evaluation reports that leaders now provide to the IEB about the quality of teaching and learning are more succinct, assessment information is clearer and action plans are more streamlined. The IEB takes nothing at face value and checks the work of leaders through visiting school and receiving feedback and information from other external partners. Minutes of IEB meetings show that the board regularly asks pertinent questions and checks the school's progress against the key priorities rigorously. Members of the IEB have utilised their breadth of expertise and have brokered effective external support to develop the skills of

leaders and build capacity.

With support from external partners, senior leaders have established a regular cycle of monitoring to check on the quality of teaching. Leaders now carry out a regular scrutiny of pupils' books, observe teaching and talk to pupils. This strategic approach to monitoring, and the regular feedback leaders give to teachers, is helping to improve teaching. Leaders identify areas for improvement more readily and provide appropriate staff training and support. As a result of improved teaching, the progress that pupils make is also improving. Some monitoring activities, however, such as 'drop ins' to lessons are not sufficiently focused and do not provide feedback that will support improvement.

Recently appointed phase and subject leaders are beginning to contribute to improvements in the quality of teaching. For example, the leader for mathematics has worked with senior leaders, and external support from the local teaching school alliance, to analyse assessment information, observe teaching and learning and develop planning. Strategies to improve pupils' knowledge of their multiplication tables have been introduced and pupils' progress in learning their tables is now being closely monitored. Senior leaders meet regularly with phase leaders to review the impact of phase leaders' actions and the support provided for their team so that the cycle of improvement is strengthened further.

Leaders now have better systems in place to check the progress of groups of pupils and hold staff to account. Assessment information is now in a more manageable form so that leaders can analyse and evaluate the progress and attainment of pupils more easily. This helps them to identify when groups of pupils are falling behind and the additional support that might be required. For example, as a result of weaker outcomes in reading, leaders changed some aspects of their approach to the teaching of reading. As a result, progress and attainment have improved.

Leaders hold regular meetings with teachers and support staff, to monitor pupils' progress. Staff analyse and evaluate pupils' progress and attainment and evaluate the impact of any additional support. Teachers are now developing a greater understanding of pupils' starting points and the progress they are making. As a result, teachers plan work that is mostly appropriate for pupils of different abilities, including the most able. Teachers now moderate pupils' work with other schools and as a result teachers' assessments are more accurate. Leaders and teachers have developed a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate pupils' work at age-related and at a higher standard. This is now used in training and supports staff when checking the standards pupils achieve.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium was completed in June 2018. The review confirmed the positive progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils. However, it also identified that the pupil premium strategy lacked rigour and measurable outcomes that would allow leaders to evaluate the impact of the funding effectively. The review's recommendations have resulted in revisions to the

pupil premium strategy for this academic year.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is improving because leaders give teachers more effective feedback and support to improve their practice. Leaders have introduced some clear strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning in reading and mathematics. A whole-school approach to training, monitoring, evaluation and feedback is ensuring that permanent staff are implementing these strategies well.

The new structured approach to reading, 'guided understanding', has enabled teachers to provide appropriate stretch and challenge through higher-order questioning and the use of increasingly complex texts, especially for the most able. Pupils are developing a wider vocabulary and are improving their skills in reading, including skimming, scanning and retrieving text. Most teachers show pupils how to do this well. For example, pupils in Year 2 made inferences from pictures and the text to describe and compare characters in a story; pupils in Year 3 identified words and phrases they did not understand so they could be clarified; and pupils in Year 6 posed questions about the text to be considered during the reading session. A clear sequence of learning and regular reading is beginning to build pupils' reading skills more securely over time.

In mathematics, pupils are now exposed to more challenging mathematical problems. Teachers' planning and work in books show that pupils now have regular and frequent opportunities to use and explain their reasoning when solving mathematical problems. Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, so the proportion of pupils achieving a higher standard in mathematics has risen considerably. However, on occasion, teachers move pupils on too quickly before they have secured their understanding well enough. Currently, pupils do not consistently use their mathematical knowledge as well as they could to explain their understanding when solving problems.

Leaders are focusing on ensuring that teaching is good quality in the classroom so that they can address gaps in pupils' learning. Interventions that are least effective have been withdrawn and teaching assistants now support more pupils in the classroom. Senior leaders check teachers' planning to ensure that teachers use assessment information more effectively and monitor the progress of pupils who have been targeted for additional help and support. Teachers' classroom files and work in books show that teachers have a better understanding of pupils' prior attainment when they plan work for them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils behave well. They move around school in a calm and orderly fashion and wear their smart uniform with pride. They are kind and helpful and hold doors open for adults. They play happily together and look after each other if someone is upset.

Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning in most lessons. They listen and respond well to teachers and they engage effectively in their learning. Pupils respond well to high expectations and well-established routines. However, on occasion, pupils' attitudes to learning can dip when they are not taught by permanent members of staff and work is not matched appropriately to their ability.

Leaders provide effective pastoral support for pupils. For example, during the inspection, a 'caravan' visited school to teach pupils about drugs and healthy lifestyles. Parents were also invited to take part. Pupils who are newly arrived in the country are well supported. Several parents commented that their children had settled quickly and were making good progress.

Outcomes for pupils

Since the last inspection, standards have been rising. Outcomes at the end of Reception dipped in 2018. However, leaders can give specific reasons for this decline, linked to the specific needs of the cohort of pupils. Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 shows an upward trend so that all subjects are now close to, or above, national averages. The proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the phonics screening check rose to above the national average in 2018.

Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2, except for reading, is now broadly in line with, or above, the national average, including at a higher standard. Overall, the gap for disadvantaged pupils has been reduced significantly so that their attainment is broadly in line with, or above, that of other pupils nationally.

Pupils' progress in mathematics improved considerably in 2017 to well above the national average. This strong progress was sustained in 2018. The proportion of pupils achieving the greater depth standard in writing also increased significantly in 2018. Progress in reading has continued to improve each year but attainment, although much improved, is still below the national average. Leaders are confident that the structured approach to reading will continue to have a further positive impact on outcomes. Work in pupils' books reflects this positive view. The progress and attainment made by current pupils has improved. Leaders and teachers now check this carefully so that pupils are no longer left behind.

External support

The quality of external support has been highly effective in developing the skills of senior leaders and supporting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. As a result of this support, and the fact that their roles and responsibilities are more clearly defined, senior leaders have grown considerably in their ability to lead the school strategically. They are now bringing about effective change so that outcomes for pupils are improving. Leaders now have a greater understanding of where the school is going and are committed to building on the positive progress made to date. However, despite improving leadership in the school, the IEB and the support

commissioned by local authority continue to play a significant role in driving school improvement.