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Mrs Finola Gill
Headteacher
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Devon
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Dear Mrs Gill

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Heather Barraclough, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 3 to 4 October 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 third 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 strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim advisory board, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, 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

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - securing leadership capacity in the school so that leaders are not overly reliant on external support
 - establishing clear systems for the performance management of staff so that teachers receive guidance and support to improve the quality of their teaching and to raise standards
 - implementing a consistent and accurate system for assessing and tracking pupils' learning
 - ensuring that governors understand the impact teaching has on pupils' progress and check more rigorously on the school's performance, holding leaders fully to account for the progress of all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged
 - developing clear lines of communication with parents
 - making sure that provision in the early years meets the needs of the children.
- 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 rates of pupils' progress
 - accurately understand what pupils can and cannot do and use this knowledge to eradicate any gaps in learning
 - increase their subject knowledge, especially about writing, 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.
- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils by:
 - ensuring that rates of attendance improve for all groups of pupils
 - developing pupils' understanding of bullying and knowledge of how to keep themselves safe.
- Improve the early years provision by ensuring that:
 - the learning environment, both indoors and outdoors, is stimulating and supports children's explorations and development of their imagination
 - assessment is improved by using it effectively to ensure that planned learning and provision builds on what children know, can do and understand, particularly in writing for boys and the most able children.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 3 to 4 October 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, senior leaders and members of the local advisory board. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the interim advisory board (IAB) by telephone. Discussions were held with pupils and parents and carers. Meetings were held with the chief executive officer and the deputy director of education and standards for Plymouth CAST ('the trust').

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the number of pupils on the school's roll has reduced further. Consequently, you have reorganised classes to reflect the smaller number of pupils, and several teaching assistants were made redundant. You have appointed a substantive assistant headteacher who has specific oversight of the progress of disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and to review the curriculum. The (IAB) remains in place. The trust has allocated a consultant headteacher to provide additional leadership support and the deputy director of education and standards is working closely with school leaders.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders of the trust reviewed the school's leadership capacity last term. As a consequence, an assistant headteacher has been appointed on a permanent, part-time basis. This provides the school with the security of leadership that is needed at this time. Additional support from the trust's deputy director of education and standards and a consultant headteacher on a part-time basis is adding further capacity.

Where necessary, leaders draw on the support of experts to provide specific advice, for example regarding early years education.

Members of the IAB appreciate the stability in this support, which they find helpful.

The membership of the IAB has remained relatively stable since the previous monitoring inspection in April 2018, with a change of one of the trust's officials. The IAB continues to hold senior leaders to account for the progress that pupils make. Members receive information from leaders, conduct their own 'deep dives' and receive assurances from trust leaders. As a result, they rightly have confidence in leaders' ability to improve the quality of education. They comment that they are beginning to see 'light at the end of the tunnel'. However, they are realistic in their evaluation that there is still some way to go for the school to no longer require special measures. Trust leaders echo this.

The chief executive officer of the trust and other trust leaders are acutely aware of the fragility of the positive progress that the school has made. They are providing additional support to ensure that the school moves forward at pace. Plans are in place that have milestones by which school leaders, trust leaders and members of the IAB can monitor the progress that is being made. Leaders are aware of the need to quicken the pace of change in some aspects of the school's work. This is particularly the case for developing the curriculum.

Staff continue to benefit from training and development to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They are involved in strategic discussions, such as those regarding the review of the curriculum. Since the previous monitoring inspection, teaching assistants are being deployed to more tightly defined roles. Some have not yet had sufficient training to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. However, leaders have refined the appraisal system for teaching assistants to align with that used by teachers to improve this aspect of the school's work.

Staff continue to develop their relationship with parents. Parents who spoke to inspectors commented positively on how well the school liaises with them both in general terms and in relation to the progress their children are making in school. This relationship is now a real strength of the school, providing a strong partnership that can help improve academic standards.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They find the staff approachable and many comment that the information they now receive about their children's progress is much more helpful. Parents appreciated the recent parent consultation event where teachers spoke to them about what their children need to do to improve and how parents can support their children's learning.

Parents continue to find the weekly newsletters informative, although the school's website is not up to date which frustrates some.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders continue to work with teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in writing. Teachers are now much clearer about what pupils in their year groups should know, understand and be able to do. The assessment framework that was introduced in 2017 for reading, writing and mathematics is now embedded across key stages 1 and 2. Teaching staff are increasingly confident when assessing what pupils know, understand and can do in reading, writing and mathematics. However, teachers' use of assessment in classes to plan and adapt learning to meet pupils' needs is still not the norm. As a result, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently and pupils who have previously 'lower-than-average attainment' struggle with work which is too hard for them.

Leaders have identified those pupils who are furthest behind in mathematics and writing. Staff have been thorough in their analysis of the aspects that these pupils have either missed or not grasped. Additional teaching sessions have been arranged

to help pupils catch up. However, these sessions have limited effectiveness as the staff who are leading them have not yet had all the training that they need.

Leaders are acutely aware that the school's curriculum needs a radical overhaul. They have begun work on this and have identified the personal development strands that they wish to thread through each half term. Leaders are working with staff to add subject detail to these plans so that there are clear expectations of what pupils should know and understand by the end of each unit.

Leaders and teachers have been successful in improving pupils' writing and their attitudes towards writing in most classes. Pupils are now able to write more descriptively as a result.

In the early years, the renovated outdoor learning environment and the internal spaces allow for a range of activities to be organised in a stimulating and effective way. A wide variety of resources are available to the pupils to engage in the different areas of the early years curriculum.

Teachers' assessment in the early years is not used to plan future learning effectively. Activities planned do not build on what children already know, can do and understand sufficiently. The most able children are not always sufficiently challenged and this slows their work rate. Leaders and a specialist leader of education are working with early years staff to improve this.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

At the inspection in February 2017, pupil attendance at school was low, and too many pupils were persistently absent. Since then leaders, working with specialist agencies, have had a concentrated effort on improving attendance. This has been successful. The rates of attendance have improved for all groups of pupils. In particular, attendance rates for disadvantaged pupils have improved sharply.

Pupils now have a clearer understanding of bullying and most recognise the difference between bullying and the occasional unkind behaviours that some pupils show. Pupils spoke confidently to one inspector about how to keep themselves safe. They talk openly about who they can speak to if there is a problem and feel confident that issues will be dealt with. They have a better understanding of the difference between what is bullying and what is being upset. They clearly stated that there was little bullying in the school, behaviour is much better and that the school environment is calmer. Bullying is now rare, and staff intervene quickly when it arises.

The 'Arc' is providing pupils with a space where they can develop socially and emotionally. Pupils who visit at social times participate in a wide range of activities that help them with their personal development. Consequently, pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence have grown.

Some pupils in some classes still struggle to sustain their concentration in class for a prolonged period of time. Teaching staff are not always attentive to this and so pupils' behaviour deteriorates.

Outcomes for pupils

The proportion of key stage 2 pupils who reached the standard expected for their age in reading increased and was in line with the national average in 2018. This is a significant improvement from the previous year but still does not represent the progress that is expected. The quality of pupils' writing was markedly better than in 2017. However, it is still below the levels seen typically nationally. Improvements in the progress Year 6 pupils made in mathematics were smaller. Current pupils are working at higher standards. However, although progress is quickening, it is not yet quickly enough to fully recover from the legacy of weak teaching in the past.

Pupils' attainment by the end of key stage 1 fell in 2018. Approximately half of the pupils reached the standard expected for their age by the end of Year 2 in writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils whose reading was at the expected standard remains in line with the national average. No pupil reached greater depth in reading, writing or mathematics.

In key stages 1 and 2, there is insufficient information available to assess how well the pupils are doing in the foundation subjects, such as history, geography or design technology.

In the early years, four fifths of children reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year. This is slightly higher than the national picture.

Through observations of pupils' learning and reviewing their work, teachers have higher expectations about what different groups of pupils should achieve. However, in some classes, staff do not consider what pupils already know and understand sufficiently. In some instances, pupils repeat work they have successfully completed previously. In others, the tasks set are too hard for some pupils and too easy for the most able. This slows progress, particularly in key stage 1.

Teachers are clearer about how to plan learning for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. As a result, there has been improvement in both their academic and personal development. The progress of pupils who are entitled to the pupil premium has also improved. It is now in line with that of their classmates except for the most able disadvantaged pupils, who are not yet making sufficient progress.

External support

Almost all of the support for the school is provided by senior leaders from the trust and a specialist leader of education from another school in the trust. Their work is supporting and challenging leaders to address the inadequacies that still remain, especially with respect to the quality of teaching and learning and the design of the

curriculum.

The school's involvement with the local teaching school's project to improve the teaching of phonics has now come to an end. The project to develop pupils' mathematical understanding in key stage 2 and support the leadership of mathematics continues.