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21 November 2018

Rebecca Nash  
Executive Principal  
St Thomas More Catholic Primary School  
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Birmingham  
West Midlands  
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Dear Mrs Nash

### **Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of St Thomas More Catholic Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and 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 most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, a group of staff, members of the governing body and a senior executive leader from the multi-academy company which the school is set to join. I also met with the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plans were evaluated.

I observed learning in parts of lessons with you, I looked at pupils' books and spoke to pupils about their learning. I also met with parents and carers at the start of the school day. I looked at the school's documents relating to the employment of staff, minutes of governors' meetings, reviews of support from external providers and records of monitoring activities.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have left and five new members of staff have joined the school. You began to support the school during the summer term after the inspection, and took up the post of executive principal in September. There is a new leadership structure in place which includes two assistant headteachers and a leader of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A permanent headteacher has been appointed and she will take up the post in April 2019.

## **The quality of leadership and management at the school**

You have acted swiftly to ensure that there is a tight focus on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The school's action plan for improvement is detailed and includes appropriate actions together with specific, measurable criteria. Subject leaders produce their own action plans for improvement. While these are also detailed and contain suitable actions, they would be further strengthened by the inclusion of measurable targets linked to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. This will ensure that senior leaders and governors are able to monitor the effectiveness of subject leaders and the impact they are having on improving provision at the school.

Leaders' revised roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood by all staff. Leaders benefit from your coaching and mentoring, which is helping them to grow in confidence. In addition, they work alongside an external consultant, provided by the local authority, to further develop their leadership skills. As a result, they now provide more effective support for you because they carry out frequent checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and use this to plan further training for teachers and teaching assistants. Leaders regularly review the quality of work in pupils' books and they provide feedback for teachers about strengths and areas for improvement. While teachers find this information useful, the activity could be further improved by ensuring that subject leaders use a consistent approach to what they focus on, and how feedback is given so that it is even more effective.

A review of the use of pupil premium funding was carried out shortly after the previous inspection. Leaders understand the barriers faced by those pupils eligible for pupil premium funding and have put actions into place to improve their progress and raise their attainment. This includes a dedicated leader of pupil premium funding who carries out fortnightly monitoring of disadvantaged pupils' work. School assessment information shows that, in some year groups, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is beginning to improve. However, differences in achievement between disadvantaged and other pupils remain throughout the school.

You have added rigour to the way pupils' progress is monitored. Progress meetings

are held in each half term and there is a high level of scrutiny of individual pupils. Leaders ensure that all teachers know the starting points of their pupils and, together, teachers and leaders set ambitious targets for achievement. You have introduced an assessment system that is linked to national curriculum expectations. However, while most teachers plan lessons that provide opportunities for pupils to work at the standard typical for their age, in many classes the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. This hinders the progress that this group of pupils can make.

Leaders ensure that there are increasing opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills in subjects across the curriculum. Well-presented writing linked to science, history, geography and religious education is displayed around the school and in classrooms. However, in some classes, particularly in key stage 2, teachers do not have high enough expectations of the amount or quality of writing that pupils will produce. As a result, some pupils do not reach the standards of which they are capable.

You have started to make changes to the whole-school curriculum. For example, topics in each year group are based around a high-quality text and there are clear links to the national curriculum. This work is in the early stages and there is more to do to fully implement your plans to introduce a curriculum that ensures that pupils acquire the knowledge and skills they need for the current and next stages of their education.

You and other leaders have acted swiftly to bring about improvements to pupils' behaviour. You introduced new behaviour and anti-bullying policies. You have ensured that these new initiatives are well understood by pupils, their parents and all staff. As a result, behaviour in classes and around the school is very positive. Pupils are polite and well-mannered. Pupils, parents and staff all agree that behaviour has improved significantly since the start of this academic year. In addition, pupils told me that there is no longer any bullying at the school. They said that adults listen to them when they have a problem and that they feel safe and well cared for.

The governing body is determined to bring about improvement. Governors now receive detailed, accurate information about the quality of teaching, pupils' progress and behaviour. Records of recent governor meetings show that they are beginning to use this information to hold leaders to account. In addition, governors are now involved in a range of monitoring activities. This allows them to find out for themselves about the school's performance. Governors understand what needs to be done for the school to improve further.

The parents and staff that I spoke to are positive about the changes since the previous inspection. Parents say that they feel welcome at the school and enjoy attending events such as 'praise assembly' and workshops with their children. Staff feel valued and, while they recognise that there is more work to do in order to

secure improvement for the school, they have every confidence in the leadership team and the actions being taken.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, 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

Jo Evans  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**