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Mary Cox
Acting headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cox

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Boniface's RC College

Following my visit with Stephen Lee, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Marie Hunter, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 to 24 January 2019, 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 May 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 not 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 in English, science and religious education. Appointments may be made on the condition that newly qualified teachers are monitored closely and provided with appropriate support.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, 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 Plymouth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - addressing urgently the weaknesses in safeguarding procedures and processes, including in the sixth form
 - devising and implementing an effective improvement plan, setting clear timelines and checking closely the impact of actions taken
 - putting in place a rigorous and coherent approach to improving the quality of teaching, including through appraisal, and responding robustly where weaknesses are identified
 - ensuring that checks on teaching quality take account of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and that the feedback gathered is used to develop a suitable programme of staff training
 - supporting leaders in developing the skills and confidence they need to carry out their roles effectively
 - ensuring that additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils is consistently effective in helping them to make more rapid progress
 - making sure that funding provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including Year 7 catch-up funding, is used effectively.
- Improve behaviour so that pupils develop good attitudes to learning and make better progress by:
 - establishing an effective culture of safety and safeguarding, in which bullying, discrimination and poor behaviour are not tolerated
 - raising expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning
 - ensuring that the school's approach to improving pupils' behaviour is effective and followed consistently
 - making sure that teaching interests and engages all pupils in their work, motivates them and helps them to make good progress.
- Improve attendance for all groups of pupils and rapidly reduce the proportion of pupils persistently absent from school.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement by:
 - making sure that teachers have the highest expectations of achievement for all groups of pupils
 - identifying the needs of different groups of pupils and ensuring that they receive effective support
 - using assessment information to identify the next steps in pupils' learning and help

them to catch up more effectively

- making sure that work is challenging enough to enable the most able pupils to reach higher standards
- maintaining a systematic focus on the development of pupils' literacy skills.

■ Improve the curriculum by:

- making sure that all pupils are following courses and programmes best suited to their needs and aspirations, including in the sixth form
- implementing a systematic approach to improving pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
- ensuring a planned and coherent approach to supporting pupils' personal, social, health and emotional development more effectively, including in the sixth form.

■ Improve the impact of leadership in the sixth form by:

- ensuring that record-keeping is accurate, of good quality and effective
- regularly evaluating the impact of provision in the sixth form, including the impact of teaching and the curriculum provided through the partnership.

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 funding should be undertaken, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 23 to 24 January 2019

Evidence

Inspectors visited lessons jointly with senior leaders to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. They scrutinised documents, including interim executive board minutes and information pertaining to progress, attendance, exclusion, behaviour, additional funding and the curriculum. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work. They met with senior leaders, middle leaders and groups of pupils. The lead inspector also held meetings with representatives of the interim executive board and a representative of the multi-academy trust to which the school belongs.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, there have been numerous staffing changes, some of which, crucially, have affected leadership capacity. The previous headteacher stood down at the end of the autumn term. The educational standards manager for the multi-academy trust, who was providing support to the headteacher, took over as interim headteacher. Shortly after, the interim headteacher was joined by a new deputy headteacher. Since the previous visit, one assistant headteacher has started maternity leave and one has returned from maternity leave. Sixteen staff left the school at the end of the last academic year and many staff are on long-term sick leave. One newly qualified teacher has been appointed in physical education. More staff are set to leave the school during this academic year. The number of pupils on roll has continued to fall, including in the sixth form, which has added to financial pressures. Most sixth-form study now takes place off the school site at other institutions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the previous monitoring visit, the high level of staff turnover, including in key leadership positions, has had a negative impact on the school's progress towards removing special measures. Although the pace of change is now picking up again, progress stalled for a time. In part, this was because the clear, strategic direction set by leaders which had been identified in previous monitoring visits was no longer there. Staff morale also declined, and certain embryonic initiatives did not become fully established. Some staffing changes have been advantageous and are starting to have a positive impact. However, at this stage on the school's journey, turbulence in leadership and staffing has hampered progress. It has prevented leaders from taking the rapid effective action necessary in the timescale available.

The new leadership team is now increasing the pace of change to make up for the shortfall described above. Although new in post, the interim headteacher and deputy headteacher have 'grasped the nettle' and, in a measured and methodical way, are making necessary changes. They are clear about what needs to improve and make no excuses for underperformance. Working through other staff, such as

the assistant head responsible for leading teaching and learning, they are increasing staff accountability and raising staff expectations. The proportion of staff who understand, welcome and meet leaders' higher expectations of professionalism and teaching quality is rising. However, leaders acknowledge that there are still too many staff who do not have the highest expectations of themselves or their pupils.

Middle leaders are motivated and keen to make a difference in their subject areas. However, their effectiveness is variable, and, as a group, they have had limited impact on raising pupils' achievement since the previous full inspection. The assistant headteacher responsible for leading teaching in the school is working closely with middle leaders to establish more robust monitoring procedures. One tool being used by staff is the teaching and learning portfolio. This is helping middle leaders to assess teachers' performance on a termly basis, using sources of evidence such as lesson observation, work scrutiny and pupil voice. This initiative is helping to bolster rigour and accountability but was introduced only in September. It is too soon to say whether it is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

Just prior to the previous monitoring visit, the interim executive board appointed a new chair. This change has helped to increase the level of challenge directed at senior and middle leaders, and develop an insistence on rigour. For example, members of the board conduct 'Deep Dive' exercises which enable them to form a comprehensive, detailed understanding of different aspects of the school's work. Areas for consideration include the curriculum and individual subjects. These exercises provide board members with the opportunity to question leaders about strengths, weaknesses and plans for improvement. However, this greater rigour has only been in place for some of the time since the previous full inspection. Consequently, the impact of the new board has been correspondingly limited.

Members of the interim executive board also share the view that there are more solid leadership foundations in place now. They have confidence in the interim headteacher and state that the leadership team is beginning to gel. However, the chair acknowledged to the lead inspector: 'It has felt like one step forward, two steps back,' since the previous monitoring visit, for the reasons outlined in this letter. She also said: 'Progress has been slower than we'd hoped.'

The new curriculum that leaders intended to launch in September 2018 is in place. Leaders and staff have given careful consideration to its structure and the need to embed learning rather than simply cover content. However, it is a work in progress. Sequences of learning across subjects vary in quality, and some do not pay enough attention to how literacy, numeracy and oracy will be incorporated. Staff are still in the process of writing next term's schemes of work. Therefore, the quality of the curriculum and its delivery is an ongoing priority for leaders.

Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of pupil premium funding and are unable to describe its impact on disadvantaged pupils' achievement. There is little evidence that this additional funding is leading to dedicated provision for identified

disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils continue to underachieve and perform less well than their peers. A review of the school's use of pupil premium has now taken place. However, the findings have not been acted upon because of changes in leadership and a lack of clarity over who is responsible for taking this work forward.

Safeguarding continues to be effective. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection and know how to make referrals using the online system. These are monitored closely by the designated safeguarding team, which provides appropriate support, either from within the school or through partnerships with external agencies. Checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with pupils are up to date, comprehensive and complete.

The improvements in leadership of the sixth form identified during previous monitoring visits have been maintained, despite the sixth form inevitably changing character as the number of students has diminished. There are now under 20 students attending the sixth form. Students' experiences of sixth-form provision are positive and they value the support they receive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching remains variable across the school. Primarily, this is because some staff still do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. They do not plan work which meets the different needs of pupils and engages their interest. Where teaching is weaker, the tasks teachers set do not stimulate pupils' thinking, creativity and imagination. In these cases, teaching is designed to secure compliant behaviour rather than engender positive attitudes to learning.

Overall, staff are not providing sufficient challenge to the most able pupils. Equally, the least able pupils and those with SEND are not provided with tailored support to enable them to make rapid progress. Too much teaching operates on a 'one size fits all' basis, which does not meet pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils do not demonstrate particularly positive attitudes to learning because they are bored.

Leaders' work to improve teaching is working, however. An increasing number of teachers are signing up to leaders' vision of what strong teaching and professionalism look like. They take pride in their work, demand a lot of themselves and have high aspirations for their pupils. In these instances, pupils enjoy their learning and take responsibility for improving their work.

Staff across the school are applying 'visual consistencies' effectively. These are non-negotiable expectations which all staff are expected to adopt, such as the expectation that pupils will line up outside classrooms in an orderly way at the beginning of lessons. Another example is the expectation that staff will share learning objectives with pupils, so they know what they are learning in the lesson. Consistent staff application of 'visual consistencies' is helping to ensure that there is

less low-level disruption in lessons. In lessons visited by inspectors, pupils arrived punctually, were routinely focused on the task in hand and were prepared for their learning with the right equipment.

The school's work to improve pupils' literacy skills is not having significant impact. Pupils' work, across the curriculum, shows that pupils are not being supported to identify and correct spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. They continue to make the same errors in successive pieces of work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Following the previous headteacher's departure at the end of the autumn term, the behaviour of pupils worsened. This was because responsibility for the management of behaviour was concentrated in the hands of a small number of leaders, some of whom left. Since then, under current leadership, a new system for the management of behaviour called 'Ready, Respect, Safe' has been introduced. Although in its infancy, it is already having demonstrable impact. Pupils' behaviour around the school is calm and orderly. In the main, pupils treat each other and staff with consideration and respect. During the inspection, pupils greeted inspectors cheerfully and were polite.

Attendance overall and for different groups of pupils is not improving and is below the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is much lower than their peers and significantly below the national average. Over one in five disadvantaged pupils are persistently absent, which is much higher than the national average. Leaders' oversight and the systems for monitoring attendance are not sufficiently robust. Staffing changes have disrupted continuity, and procedures for checking and following up on absence are too loose. This is hampering staff efforts to challenge poor attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils.

Most pupils who spoke with inspectors said that bullying is not a major issue in the school and is dealt with effectively by staff. A pupil in Year 11 commented that the school community is more tight-knit because of the smaller number of pupils currently in the school. Some younger pupils do not agree that there is less bullying, but this view is not supported by other inspection evidence. The pupils who spoke with inspectors agreed that they feel safe in the school and that there are members of staff they would speak to if they had concerns.

The new personal, social and health education curriculum has been introduced and is now being taught through regular sessions in key stages 3 and 4. However, leaders have not evaluated its effectiveness and so it is not possible to comment on its impact. Nevertheless, in the sixth form, students are highly positive about the careers advice and guidance they receive. They are clear about their next steps once they leave the school. Students are also positive about the pastoral care they receive from staff.

Outcomes for pupils

Leaders were disappointed with the 2018 Year 11 examination outcomes. The attainment and progress of all groups of pupils, across most subjects, were well below average. To an extent, the results were surprising, because teachers' assessments had been inaccurate and overgenerous. They had created an overly optimistic forecast. Consequently, leaders are focusing on improving the accuracy and reliability of teachers' assessments for current pupils.

The work in pupils' books, observations of teaching and learning, and the school's own progress information indicate that pupils are still not making adequate progress. Too many pupils do not care enough about improving their work and succeeding in their different subjects.

The most able pupils are not challenged to achieve the progress of which they are capable. They are not provided with tasks that deepen their thinking and strengthen their tenacity and resilience. The most able pupils receive too little guidance to push them forward in their learning and they do not know how to improve. Consequently, their response to tasks is 'lukewarm' and they produce underdeveloped or limited work. This prevents them from acquiring the knowledge and practising the skills required for examinations.

Staff are providing effective pastoral support for vulnerable pupils and those with SEND. The Student Support Centre (SSC) and Learning for Life Centre provide pupils with access to quiet, safe spaces where they can be supported on a one-to-one basis. In the SSC, staff help pupils to overcome issues such as anger, bereavement and family break-up. However, support is not yet making a difference to pupils' academic achievement because it is not sufficiently focused on classroom practice, target setting and progress monitoring.

Disadvantaged pupils are not making sufficient progress and are lagging behind their peers in most year groups. They are not receiving the dedicated, tailored provision they require, in part because there is too little strategic oversight of pupil premium funding.

External support

Since the previous full inspection, support from the multi-academy trust to which the school belongs has not resulted in higher achievement and improved outcomes for pupils. The previous headteacher was supported by an educational standards manager who has since replaced him as headteacher. She is now supported by a deputy headteacher, where there was previously no such role. These changes have helped to 'keep the ship afloat', but support has not enabled leaders to make rapid gains up until now. However, the trust is now in a position to offer greater support. A new education standards manager is soon to start working with the school, and a partnership is forming with a local school to meet some of St Boniface's needs. The

extent to which this support is having a positive impact will be clearer on the next monitoring visit. Trust representatives are confident, with good reason, that the leadership changes that have occurred have laid strong foundations for swift future progress, even if this progress is not apparent now.