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Mrs Jane Howie-Lee
St Mary's RC Primary School
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Dear Mrs Howie-Lee

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 and 3 April 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 I received during the inspection and for the time that was 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 July 2018.

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 improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Clifton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in July 2018.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders urgently establish an effective safeguarding culture which leads to close supervision of pupils and thorough assessment of risks across the school
 - leaders at all levels have an accurate understanding of the school's work and tackle weaknesses swiftly in order to challenge underperformance
 - leaders implement robust assessment systems to check the progress of pupils accurately
 - leaders monitor pupils' progress closely and use this information to identify underperformance where it occurs, acting swiftly to bring about improvements
 - a rich and varied curriculum is in place, which develops pupils' knowledge across a range of subjects
 - leadership of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is in place so that pupils are well supported and make good progress
 - governors access school performance information so that they can challenge leaders where underperformance occurs
 - the use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils enables pupils to make good progress.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers consider closely what pupils know and can do so that they provide learning that builds on pupils' knowledge and understanding and matches their needs
 - teachers deploy support staff effectively to improve pupils' outcomes
 - teachers raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve significantly
 - teachers develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills in mathematics so that pupils confidently apply their understanding of mathematics and calculation skills to solve problems
 - teaching enthuses pupils, resulting in improved attitudes to learning
 - teachers help pupils to learn from their mistakes so that errors are not repeated.
- Improve attendance, particularly for those pupils who are persistently absent.
- Improve early years by ensuring that:
 - staff use accurate assessment information to plan activities that meet the needs of children in the Nursery and Reception

- transition arrangements between the Nursery Year and the Reception Year are improved so that children make better progress from their starting points
- staff provide sufficient challenge and raise their expectations of children’s achievement
- staff are vigilant in managing risks so that children in the early years are well supervised and safe.

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.

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 2 to 3 April 2019

Evidence

As the headteacher was unavailable during the visit, the inspector met with the advisory headteacher. The inspector visited lessons, jointly with the advisory headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), to observe pupils' learning and behaviour. She scrutinised documents and met with senior leaders, groups of pupils, a member of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative from the local authority. The inspector also spoke with parents and carers and considered 133 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been several significant staff changes, including the appointment of a new headteacher, a new deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. A new early years leader has also been appointed to oversee this phase. In addition, there have been appointments to administrative roles, including that of a business manager. The local governing body was disbanded in November 2018 and has been replaced by an IEB.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Since the last inspection, leaders have worked with determination to tackle the weaknesses highlighted in the previous inspection report and to improve pupils' experiences at the school. To this end, considerable changes have been made to the way that the school is organised. Leaders now have a better understanding of the quality of education the school provides. Based on this information, plans have been devised to tackle the shortfalls of the past.

Leaders now track more accurately the progress that pupils make. They are confident about the reliability of this information through external validation and internal moderation. Teachers now regularly discuss with leaders the progress of their classes and how pupils can be supported to reach their potential.

Leaders are well supported by the local authority, which has been involved with the school in different ways. Most significantly, it has rectified the deficiencies raised in the previous inspection report about the safety of the school site, including that of the early years environment.

There is now a culture of vigilance around safeguarding. Staff training is in place and all staff are aware of how to report concerns. Leaders make the statutory checks and follow government guidelines to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. The changes made to the single central register mean that this records all the necessary information.

Leaders seek advice from external agencies and work with them to support pupils who are at risk. However, when referrals are made, some of the recorded information lacks detail and is ambiguous. Leaders are not always persistent enough in following up concerns if they are not satisfied that they have received a timely response. This will be a focus for the next monitoring visit.

The commissioning of an advisory headteacher by the local authority has been a positive decision. It has effectively supported leaders newly appointed to their roles. She has the necessary experience to provide guidance so that senior leaders continue to develop their skills. This work has centred on assisting leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions more confidently. There is still some way to go, as action plans still largely centre on the completion of actions rather than precise analysis of what has worked and what has not. Nonetheless, leaders are becoming more aware of the need to develop their strategic overview and to be more autonomous in sustaining the momentum for improvement.

Leaders' plans to tackle the legacy of weak performance are evolving and are beginning to show signs of initial impact. An important strand of the approach adopted has been to provide the training that staff need. The local authority has supported this, and visits have been made to other schools to look at effective practice. There is now greater monitoring of classroom practice, and expectations have been raised of what pupils can and should achieve. Where practice falls short of these expectations, decisive action has been taken and tailored support is in place to remedy this. Even so, the impact of this work is variable, and the quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent.

The IEB was appointed in November 2018, so the recommended review of governance has not taken place. Members of this newly constituted group have the necessary skills and expertise, together with the commitment, to make the changes needed.

Their initial focus has been to establish robust financial management and oversight and to review policies and protocols. With these now in place, there is greater delineation of their role and this has clarified how they will work with school leaders. They visit regularly to understand, at first hand, the work of the school. These visits are aligned to the improvement plan and provide the information they need to gauge how well leaders are making the improvements necessary. They challenge and ask probing questions to ensure that school leaders provide evidence for the assertions they make. While conversations have been uncomfortable at times, governors recognise the imperative of this and are resolute in their ambition for the school.

Changes have been made to the provision for pupils with SEND. The SENCo, newly appointed at the time of the previous inspection, has since identified the nature and extent of the support required. She has mapped out provision closely to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of pupils. These interventions are leading to

improvements in the short term but it is not always clear how this support is built upon in regular classes. The SENCo is continuing to work with staff so that they set appropriate targets and adapt their planning to the needs of pupils.

The external review of the use of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils took place in the autumn term. This has provided useful guidance for leaders about the allocation of funding and provision. However, the overview of its impact lacks coherence. Therefore, leaders are not easily able to evaluate which strategies are effective. While such pupils are now making improved progress, this is still not fast enough for them to catch up with the standards expected for their ages.

Leaders have made changes to the leadership of the early years phase. This has been a positive move. Staff are passionate about their work and know their children well. The overview of the progress that children make has improved and is evidenced by detailed and beautifully presented learning journals. These identify children's development in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers use assessment more rigorously and, where there are gaps in children's skills, employ this information to adapt the curriculum. The environment has been vastly improved to facilitate this. Nursery and Reception classes now share approaches, and the transfer of consistent information will smooth this transition. Work is now continuing to improve these links between the early years stage and key stage 1.

The combination of the actions taken has led to a greater optimism, and morale among staff is improving. Pupils, too, commented on the palpable changes that they have experienced, particularly around the management of behaviour and their enjoyment of mathematics. Leaders have invited parents into the school in the aftermath of the special measures judgement. They recognise the need to continue to work closely with parents to restore trust.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have arranged extensive training for teachers to improve teaching, learning and assessment. The learning environment is vibrant and 'working walls' display helpful information to remind pupils of key ideas. Pupils generally respond well to the school's raised expectations for the standard of presentation.

The quality of teaching has improved in a number of aspects but is deficient in others. Though expectations are now 'non-negotiable', there is variability in the impact this change has had. This is because there is still too much focus on compliance with the policy, rather than on teachers becoming skilled enough to use the recently introduced strategies to support pupils to develop their knowledge and skills at the appropriate level.

Pupils do not always reflect on the guidance they are given from teachers, although that is what is expected of them. They politely acknowledge teachers' comments but this does not lead to demonstrable improvement in their understanding. Some

pupils continue to make similar, and often elementary, mistakes, relating particularly to mathematical fluency and technical accuracy, and this hinders their progress.

Crucially, teachers do not astutely pinpoint the skills that will lead to improved progress, particularly for the most able pupils, so that they can demonstrate a higher standard. Therefore, there remains a disparity in the progress that pupils make between classes and in different areas of the curriculum. Pupils are not routinely supported to overcome the legacy of weaker teaching, particularly in their understanding of phonics. Additional adults have established good relationships with pupils but are either not deployed effectively enough or lack the skills that they need to support pupils' learning needs.

Moreover, there remains too little focus on the wider curriculum. Pupils do not cover all the areas required in the national curriculum in sufficient depth. Often, important areas of the curriculum are touched on briefly and activities sit as isolated events. Therefore, pupils cannot build on what they already know and cannot confidently develop subject-specific vocabulary and concepts.

There is improvement in some areas, notably mathematics. The more structured approach to the teaching of mathematics has enhanced pupils' enjoyment and is beginning to support them to apply their understanding to problem-solving and reasoning tasks. However, the full impact of this approach has not been realised yet because teachers are not adept at adapting their planning to direct pupils to suitable starting points. Where pupils are given the choice, they tend to opt for the easier task that does not pose a suitable level of challenge. Those pupils who require additional support do not always receive this in a timely way. Furthermore, the most able pupils often do not explain their reasoning and methodology accurately or in sufficient depth. Indeed, work that is incorrect or lacks clarity is praised and this does little to improve pupils' skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils are polite, articulate and welcoming. Their attitude to their school and to learning is largely positive. Classrooms are conducive to learning but, where individual pupils lose focus or are reluctant to tackle a task, this is a direct result of teachers' planning not meeting their needs sufficiently.

Pupils recognise the changes that have been made 'in a short space of time' and say that these are for the better. They are perceptive in their views about how teachers have 'absorbed more information on their training days', which they say is helping pupils to achieve more. Year 6 pupils say that they are now more focused on their learning in preparation for the end-of-year assessments.

Pupils say that their teachers look after them well and they appreciate that there is now more transparency about how behaviour expectations are managed. They like

to take responsibility for events going on in the school, such as pupils selling charity raffle tickets for the upcoming Easter egg hunt. Other pupils support these activities enthusiastically. Pupils like to be recognised for things they have done well.

The school environment is a positive place to be and this is the view of all of the pupils spoken with during the visit. They say that there are many opportunities for them to further their interests and develop their skills in musical, artistic and scientific pursuits.

In the previous inspection report, leaders were charged with improving rates of attendance. Leaders now have an effective overview of rates of absence and are challenging poor attendance more stringently. This has led to attendance overall being in line with national averages, including for vulnerable groups. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has dropped sharply because of these concerted efforts.

Outcomes for pupils

The observations made in lessons and the work presented in pupils' books reflect that pupils are overall making better progress than has been the case in the past, particularly pupils with SEND.

However, the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that not all pupils make the progress that they should. In some year groups, many pupils' skills fall short of age-related expectations, particularly those of disadvantaged pupils. Such pupils have a gap to close between their potential and their current attainment. It is not clear how teachers will support pupils to close these deficits rapidly.

External support

The local authority has been active in supporting the school since the last inspection. The appointment of the advisory headteacher has been pivotal in providing the depth of experience to support leaders who are new in their roles. The local authority conducts regular reviews to evaluate the school's effectiveness and recommend subsequent actions. The conclusions from these visits mirror leaders' understanding that headway has been made but there is still much to do.

The school receives a substantial degree of support to ensure that safeguarding processes are robust, to strengthen leadership and to improve its teaching. Local authority advisers provide guidance in English and mathematics, improving leaders' understanding of how to achieve appropriate standards. They have verified standards in all key stages, including the early years phase. The school is working with an external partner to develop the teaching of phonics.

Leaders are receptive to this advice but, despite the work that has been

undertaken, they know that this has not yet had the impact required on teaching, learning and assessment across the school. This is now their priority.