

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Paul Bacon
Headteacher
St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Rowden Hill
Chippenham
Wiltshire
SN15 2AH

Dear Mr Bacon

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

Following my visit with Marie Thomas, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 18-19 May 2021, 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 July 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered 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 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 reports website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah McGinnis
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 18 May 2021 and 19 May 2021

Context

Since the monitoring inspection in April 2019, the interim executive board has been replaced by a local governing body. The current headteacher was appointed in an interim capacity in September 2019, following a period of turnover in school leadership. It is intended that he will stay in post until the school converts to an academy. The senior leadership team has been reformed and a new early years leader has been appointed. There has been a restructuring of classes since the full return of pupils to school following the national restrictions.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The interim executive board has served its purpose in providing greater stability and systems to support the school. As a result, improvements have been made to the way in which pupils hone their reading and mathematical skills, how pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are supported, the processes in place to keep pupils safe and the early years provision.

A new local governing body is continuing to work with the local authority and with diocesan leaders to make decisions about the future direction the school will take. This has taken a lot of their focus. This has meant that there has not been a sharp enough scrutiny of the content of what pupils will learn or the impact of the actions that leaders have taken. Currently, governors do not question sufficiently why leaders are making the decisions they are about the future plans for the curriculum.

Some recent decisions have detracted from school leaders' capacity to further plans for improvement at the speed required. Action has now been taken to secure the continuity of leadership, together with the time needed, to start on much required curriculum work.

Leaders have used external advice to inform their decisions about what pupils will learn in the wider curriculum. They have defined their principles for curriculum development and their intention that this must provide a rich range of experiences for pupils. However, they are at a very early stage of this process. They have some work to do to assure themselves that their emerging plans will meet the depth of subject knowledge required. Currently, the curriculum is not effective enough in ensuring that pupils' understanding is secure in the full range of subjects that form the national curriculum.

Leaders have made greater progress in the development of pupils' reading and their understanding of mathematics. Well understood routines make classrooms settled environments in which pupils can learn effectively. Children in the early years and pupils in Year 1 engage enthusiastically and energetically in their learning of

phonics. Teachers systematically build up pupils' ability to recognise letters and the sounds they make. The focus on 'reading for accuracy' is the foundation for this and supports pupils to recognise unfamiliar words. Pupils who require additional support receive the help they need to improve their reading.

A coherent approach is in place across the school to develop wider reading skills. Pupils encounter a range of texts and these provide the stimulus for some effective pieces of writing. Pupils write competently with variation in vocabulary and increasing technical accuracy. However, some pupils in key stage 2 have gaps in their phonic understanding which is seen in the accuracy of their spelling.

Leaders have also successfully promoted a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils are encouraged to use mathematical language in class and are improving their confidence in mathematical processes. However, opportunities to explore reasoning questions are not provided consistently across all year groups. Pupils in key stage 2 told us that they sometimes find reasoning difficult because 'they don't know the words'.

Teachers share their assessment of pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics with leaders at key points in the year. Leaders, therefore, know the pupils who need extra help and secure appropriate support. However, leaders do not have a secure enough understanding of the gaps that exist in pupils' knowledge in the wider curriculum, so that they can ensure teachers adapt their curriculum plans.

Pupils with SEND are identified swiftly and appropriate support is put in place. Staff contribute effectively to these plans. However, the impact of the national restrictions has meant that leaders do not fully know where pupils with SEND have gaps in their knowledge or how quickly these are being closed.

Staff provide a warm and nurturing environment. The many positive conversations that happen, both in class and in the corridor, make pupils feel safe and valued. In turn, pupils, including children in the early years, readily engage in conversation. They take the responsibilities that staff give them with pride and complete these with good humour.

Pupils say that their personal, social and health education sessions help them to understand each other better. Children in the early years put any worries into a 'worry boat' to help them settle into their day. Pupils in other years say that they are confident to talk to their teacher about any issues that concern them.

Leaders' work to restore parents' trust in the school is reflected in the responses received through Ofsted's online survey 'Parent View'. These paint a positive picture of the care and support that staff provide for pupils. Staff, too, are committed to the school's journey of improvement. They say that they feel valued and that leaders are mindful of workload issues.

Leaders are knowledgeable about the welfare needs of pupils and liaise with external agencies when necessary. Training for staff is up to date and they are quick to report concerns should they arise. However, staff are less confident about the risks that pupils might encounter in their local area.

The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that governors have a secure enough understanding of the school's curriculum so they can challenge leaders to improve the quality of education.
- Develop leaders' understanding of an effective curriculum.

Additional support

Local authority advisers have worked closely with the school since the previous inspection. This has supported the school to address its initial priorities and has provided a base on which the next phase of improvements can be built. Leaders have made use of helpful advice to begin work on the curriculum. However, leaders do not yet have enough of the necessary expertise to develop a strong, effective curriculum in all subjects.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff and pupils. Inspectors also met with representatives from the local governing body, the diocese and the local authority.