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James Forber  
Headteacher  
St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School  
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Cheshire  
WA7 5YH

Dear Mr Forber

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School**

Following my visit with Craig Yates, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 and 24 November 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 most 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 November 2019. 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 had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We discussed the ongoing 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 those responsible for governance 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 early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.**

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the director of education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury, the director of education for the Church of England Diocese of Chester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Halton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pennington  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 23 and 24 November 2021**

### **Context**

The interim headteacher was appointed as substantive headteacher in November 2021. Since the previous inspection, two senior leaders and four teachers have left the school. An assistant headteacher joined the school in September 2021. A further assistant headteacher and two lead practitioners have been appointed and will take up post in January 2022.

Throughout the summer term 2021, the school experienced consistently high volumes of staff and pupil absence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The progress made towards the removal of special measures**

Members of the interim executive board (IEB) and leaders are successfully tackling the weaknesses at St Chad's Catholic and Church of England High School. They have established a secure foundation on which to further strengthen the capacity of leadership and the quality of education.

Despite the considerable challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the IEB have taken the time to rigorously unpick the school's weaknesses. They have wasted no time in making important changes to the staffing structure and the curriculum. Throughout this time, they have ensured that the school has benefited from stable and effective interim leadership. In addition, they have made sure that the new substantive headteacher has a thorough understanding of the scale and depth of the school's weaknesses.

The appointment of the substantive headteacher has brought vital capacity to the leadership of the school. Leaders are successfully building further capacity at senior level through additional appointments and changes to leaders' roles. The pace of change has been hindered by the absence of staff and pupils during the pandemic. Nonetheless, leaders have taken the right actions to improve subject leadership, the quality of education and the attendance and behaviour of pupils.

Leaders have clear and well-thought-out plans for improvement. These plans are tightly focused on the key shortcomings in the school. The plans are well organised, and set out clearly the specific actions to tackle weaknesses. Leaders, including members of the IEB, use these plans as an effective tool to measure the impact of their actions.

Leaders have established a new curriculum that is broad and balanced. It provides a suitably wide range of subjects for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Pupils get enough time to study these subjects in sufficient depth. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 now have access to an appropriate range of academic and vocational subjects. All pupils in the school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have equal access to the full curriculum.

Leaders have begun to strengthen subject leadership. Increasingly, they are working closely with subject leaders to model effective leadership. This has helped subject leaders to review and improve subject plans. These plans are clear about the subject content that should be taught. Leaders carefully check the content of their subject plans to ensure that these support the aims and ambition of the national curriculum. Pupils now learn topics in a sensible order. However, in many of the new curriculum plans, subject leaders have not identified the most important knowledge that pupils need to gain. This means that teachers are not clearly informed about exactly what knowledge pupils should learn.

Leaders' support to help teachers select the right teaching approaches to deliver the new curriculums is at an early stage. Leaders have recently introduced more rigorous approaches to monitor the delivery of the curriculum. These are beginning to provide useful information about what teachers do well and what they need to improve. Leaders have appropriate plans to use this information to support staff with targeted training and coaching.

The leadership of SEND has been strengthened. Leaders have significantly improved the identification of these pupils' needs. Staff are beginning to use this information to provide support for some pupils. However, as their monitoring systems are relatively new, they do not have a clear picture of how effectively teachers support pupils with SEND. They lack sufficient insight into the difference that staff's support is making to pupils' achievement.

Leaders are making effective use of a wider range of information to better diagnose pupils' reading abilities. Pupils at the earliest stages of learning to read are now getting additional support to help them with their phonics, comprehension and grammar. Leaders are providing better information for teachers about pupils' reading abilities. Leaders have appropriate plans to help staff to use this information to support pupils' reading more effectively in lessons.

Leaders have strengthened their systems for promoting and monitoring pupils' attendance. They make informed use of a wider range of appropriate tools to support and challenge pupils whose attendance is poor. The attendance of pupils since April 2021 is showing some early signs of improvement. However, there are still large gaps in the attendance of some groups of pupils. This includes pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND.

Leaders have very recently introduced new approaches to reduce the number of pupils who are late to school. In a short space of time, almost half of the pupils who were usually late now arrive at school on time. That said, the punctuality of many pupils is still a concern.

Leaders have introduced new expectations about pupils' behaviour. They are making effective use of better systems to track concerns about pupils' conduct in lessons. Pupils said that this is helping to reduce disruption in some lessons. Pupils' behaviour around school is mostly calm and appropriate. Many pupils have good relationships with staff. They respond well to staff's requests. Some pupils do not manage their behaviour as well

as others. Furthermore, some teachers do not notice or respond effectively to poor behaviour around school. Leaders are taking appropriate steps to support staff to develop the skills and strategies that they need to manage behaviour consistently well.

Leaders have successfully developed positive relationships with staff. Staff have a real clarity about the journey of improvement the school is on. They have confidence in the decisions made by senior leaders. They told inspectors that they value the communication and consistency that senior leaders now model. Staff feel valued and considered. They feel that their views appropriately influence decisions and processes. They said that leaders listen to and address staff concerns over workload and well-being. They feel supported, and highly value the time they get for professional development.

### **Additional support**

Leaders make effective use of support from Halton local authority to strengthen the knowledge and practices of senior and subject leaders. Additionally, this support has helped leaders to establish systems and practices for attendance, behaviour and SEND that are fit for purpose. Leaders have utilised support from a local trust to ensure that subject leaders have a secure understanding of effective curriculum planning. They have used further expertise from a local college and multi-academy trust to help subject leaders sharpen the focus of subject plans.

### **Evidence**

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with members of the IEB. Inspectors also met with representatives of Halton local authority, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury and the Church of England Diocese of Chester.

Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. They met with groups of subject leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding record, subject plans and the records of pupils' attendance and behaviour. They spoke with leaders who have responsibility for reading and SEND.

Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff. They also took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including the comments received on Ofsted's free-text facility.