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John Mollard
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mollard

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

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 2 and 3 November 2022, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in February 2022.

During the inspection, I discussed with you, other senior leaders, governors, the local authority and the diocese the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also met with other staff, reviewed pupils' work, visited lessons, spoke to pupils, watched pupils read to a member of staff and scrutinised documents relating to safeguarding, governance and school improvement. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

St Gregory's Catholic Primary School remains inadequate and requires special measures. Leaders have made insufficient progress to improve the school.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

The school should take further action to:

- finalise the chosen approach to the teaching of early reading as a matter of urgency. The chosen reading curriculum must support all children and pupils, including those who have fallen behind, to build secure phonics knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained to deliver this curriculum consistently well.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

At the time of the last full inspection, an interim executive headteacher was leading the school. A new headteacher took up the post in September 2022. Several staff left the school at the end of the summer term. Most of the classes are taught by recently appointed teachers. In a short space of time, the new headteacher has created a unified and harmonious staff team. Staff morale is high. Staff appreciate that leaders are considerate of their workload. There is a renewed sense of purpose among staff to bring about improvements to the school.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have not taken the urgent action needed to ensure that children and pupils receive an ambitious curriculum. Leaders have been too slow to address weaknesses in reading. They have only recently made a well-thought-out appointment to strengthen the leadership of reading. It is too soon to measure the impact of this action. Leaders are currently reviewing the approach to the teaching of early reading. As an interim measure, they have replaced the reading curriculum that was in place at the time of the last inspection. However, the current reading curriculum does not provide teachers with the support that they need to ensure that all pupils develop secure reading knowledge. Leaders plan to introduce a new reading curriculum in the spring term of 2023.

In the meantime, children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 do not benefit from a well-ordered approach to the teaching of reading. While some pupils read books that are well matched to the sounds that they know, others do not. This means that children and pupils who are learning to read do not quickly gain the phonics knowledge that they need in readiness for future learning. Leaders have not ensured that pupils who have fallen behind receive well-tailored support to help them to catch up swiftly. That said, older pupils enjoy reading. The pupils who spoke with me said that their teachers take a genuine interest in what they read and encourage them to read widely.

Leaders' plans to improve the wider curriculum also lack rigour and effective prioritisation. For example, early years leaders have focused on improving the classroom environment rather than the curriculum. The curriculum remains weak and narrow. Senior leaders lack the curricular knowledge and expertise that they need to design and put in place a high-quality curriculum across the school, including in the early years. As a result, children and pupils are not learning as well as they should.

In addition to the poorly designed curriculum, leaders do not support teachers to deliver the curriculum well. In several subjects, leaders remain unclear about the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which this should be taught. Consequently, teachers do not understand how to shape their teaching so that children in the early years and older pupils build their knowledge securely over time. Added to this, teachers are ill-equipped to adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils, including those with SEND, receive a disorganised learning experience. They do not gain the knowledge and skills that they need to be successful.

Despite the ongoing weaknesses in the curriculum, leaders have acted decisively to address the issues with behaviour identified at the time of the last inspection. They have taken appropriate action to improve pupils' attitudes to learning. Pupils throughout the school are increasingly respectful and caring towards each other. There is a calm and purposeful feel to lessons. Pupils do not disturb each other's learning.

Governors have benefited from recent training opportunities offered by the local authority and other professional organisations. They have developed a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities as a result. This has sharpened governors' ability to hold leaders to account for many aspects of the school's work. Recent appointments to the governing body have further strengthened its capacity. Governors are now better equipped to challenge leaders. Governors share leaders' desire to bring about school improvement. They now have the necessary information and expertise to enable them to support leaders to make this happen.

Leaders have addressed weaknesses in safeguarding with urgency. Their actions have been swift and appropriate. For example, staff have received the training that they need to keep pupils safe. Staff understand how to raise any concerns that they may have about a pupil. All staff understand how to use the school's electronic reporting system effectively. Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school. They trust the adults to help sort out any problems that they may have. Safeguarding is now effective. There are suitable systems in place to ensure that all adults who work in school are safe to do so. However, governors' oversight of this aspect of the school's work needs to be strengthened further.

Leaders have welcomed a range of external support to help them to improve safeguarding systems and processes, SEND and early years provision. However, given the newness of some of this support, it is too soon to measure its impact. The evidence gathered at this inspection indicates that leaders require additional support to develop their capacity to improve the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Cheshire East. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Stillings
His Majesty's Inspector