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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
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Mary Bowden
Headteacher
St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, Stockport
Roman Road
Heaton Norris
Stockport
Cheshire
SK4 1RF

Dear Mrs Bowden

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

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 1 and 2 November 2023, 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 January 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, governors, the local authority and the Diocese of Salford 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 visited some lessons, met with some staff and with some pupils, looked at pupils' books, and looked at a range of documentation. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School Stockport 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:

- undertake, as a matter of urgency, a full review of the curriculum from the early years to Year 6 to ensure that it is ambitious and sets out clearly, in a logical order, the steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn, in order to be well prepared for the next stage in their education
- ensure that the teaching of phonics enables children in the Reception class to catch up quickly so that they achieve as they should.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes to the school's governance. In September 2022, the local authority and the diocese put in place a joint executive board to strengthen the work of the governing body. A number of governors have left the governing body. A new chair of governors and a number of new governors have been appointed. The joint executive board is no longer in place.

On 31 October 2023, an executive headteacher was appointed to the school. The school no longer has a deputy headteacher.

The reluctance of members of the governing body to accept the findings of the previous inspection report has hampered the school's progress towards the removal of special measures. The school and the governors have maintained an over-optimistic view of the school's strengths. They have not recognised the extent of its weaknesses. This has resulted in a very slow start to the school's journey of improvement. The consequences have been borne by pupils who, 22 months on, continue to experience a poor quality of education.

Concerns over the school's financial viability have led to a protracted and hitherto unsuccessful progress towards academisation. Throughout this period, the school's capacity to improve has continued to be dependent upon external support. The recent strengthening of the school's leadership and governance arrangements has come too late to ensure that the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been tackled successfully.

In the months following the inspection, the school worked with external advisers to carry out a review of the curriculum. This has been successful in ensuring that it now covers all of the subjects of the national curriculum. The school has also purchased additional resources for teachers to help them to design more appropriate activities. However, work to improve and develop the curriculum beyond this broad overview has been slow and has not successfully addressed key weaknesses.

The development of the curriculum has not gone far enough. In almost all subjects, insufficient thought has been given to all of the knowledge that pupils need to learn. Moreover, the order in which pupils should learn this key knowledge has not been considered. Similarly, too little thought has been given to the coherence of the curriculum between the early years and key stage one. This is preventing pupils from building new knowledge on firm foundations.

There has been too little focus on making sure that the curriculum has enough ambition for pupils' achievement. In fact, older pupils in mixed-age classes sometimes repeat learning that they have already experienced, while younger pupils do not have the prior knowledge that they need to successfully learn new subject content. This approach also means that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) find it difficult to make the necessary gains in their learning. As a result, pupils' achievement is not improving securely over time.

The school has made little progress with its work to improve the teaching of reading. Children in the early years struggle to break down and build up words because their knowledge of letters and sounds is insecure. Older pupils at the early stage of reading sometimes receive reading books that are too difficult for them to read. This prevents pupils from developing proficiency and confidence in reading.

The weaknesses in pupils' reading knowledge also have a negative impact on their ability to spell correctly and to write accurately. This is evident in the work in their books across a range of different subjects. Overall, pupils across the school, including those with SEND, do not achieve as well as they should in reading. The 2023 unvalidated data shows that a considerable proportion of the Year 6 pupils left key stage 2 without the reading skills that they needed for the next stage in their education.

The school is improving its approach to securing pupils' attendance. As a result, fewer pupils are now persistently absent from school. However, it has been less successful in ensuring that pupils readily engage with their learning. Some staff do not set high enough expectations for pupils' behaviour. This means that some pupils' behaviour has not improved well enough. For example, some pupils behave boisterously or inappropriately outdoors. Others engage in low-level disruption that disturbs the learning of others. These poor behaviours make other pupils feel unhappy at times.

Limited work has taken place to improve pupils' personal development. For example, the school now provides more opportunities for pupils to learn about the festivals and celebrations which are key to some faiths and cultures. Pupils have taken part in a project with an orchestra. However, these improvements do not go far enough in preparing pupils for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school has been slow to improve. In the months following the inspection, the local authority and diocese provided external support and challenge for governors through a joint executive board. However, the reluctance of governors to accept the inspection findings meant that the board had very little impact on governors'

work to drive improvement. Very recently members of the joint executive board have taken up key governance roles and things have begun to change for the better. For example, governors have now added capacity to the school's ability to improve through the appointment of an executive headteacher. There is evidence that governors are now providing greater challenge to leaders for their work to improve the curriculum. However, this work is too recent to have had any impact.

The school has received a range of support from external partners since the last inspection. This support has provided opportunities for staff training, especially for those who lead subjects. However, the school has not made sure that this training has had enough impact on the curriculum design and delivery to ensure that it supports pupils to build secure and deepening knowledge in readiness for the next stage in their education.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of governors, the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Mavis Smith
His Majesty's Inspector