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30 January 2009

Mr S. Hayes
Executive headteacher
St John Fisher RC School
Reeves Way
Peterborough
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Dear Mr Hayes

Special measures: monitoring inspection of St John Fisher RC School

Following my visit with Lynne Blakelock, Kenneth Thomas and Jill Smith, Additional Inspectors, to your school on 20 and 21 January 2009, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in April 2008. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – *satisfactory*

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – *satisfactory*

Newly qualified teachers *may be appointed only after consultation with HMI*

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Peterborough, and the Diocesan Director of Schools' Service for the Diocese of East Anglia.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King

H M Inspector

Special measures: monitoring of St John Fisher RC School

Report from the second monitoring inspection on 20 and 21 January 2009

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the executive headteacher, the senior leadership team, six middle leaders, two representatives from the local authority (LA), and the chair of the interim executive board (IEB).

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection 3.5 FTE teachers have left the school and 6.9 FTE teachers have joined.

Achievement and standards

Unvalidated Key Stage 4 data confirms the analysis of the 2008 GCSE results reported in the previous monitoring letter. Standards attained were exceptionally low in comparison to national averages.

In the current Years 10 and 11 there are pupils who are making satisfactory or good progress over time and working in line with or above national averages. However, the school's own much-improved assessment information accurately identifies that there is widespread underachievement among all groups of pupils in a range of subjects, including English and science and particularly in mathematics. Standards overall in these year groups are very low. Recent assessments of Year 11 pupils indicates that the school is not on track to meet its targets in the summer 2009. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Underachievement is also widespread in Year 9. In Years 7 and 8, lesson observations during the inspection indicate that more pupils in these year groups are working in line with national expectations than in Years 9-11.

The actions taken to improve the quality of teaching have begun to improve the progress pupils are making in lessons. Teachers have been greatly assisted by the improved information which they have about the pupils in their classes, for example, those who are learning English as an additional language or have learning difficulties. This is beginning to enable teachers to plan more effectively and to align their teaching more closely to the pupils' needs. Overall, pupils made satisfactory progress in the lessons observed during the inspection. In the best lessons progress was good or occasionally outstanding. This represents a clear improvement since the previous monitoring inspection. However, these improvements are too new to have started to have an impact on remedying the deep-seated weaknesses in some pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and thereby begin to raise standards. The school is aware that pupils, especially those in Key Stage 4, need to make

accelerated progress in all lessons, and particularly in those where data indicates they are underachieving.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2008:

- Raise students' achievement especially in mathematics and for underachieving groups, including boys, students with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language – inadequate

Personal development and well-being

Behaviour is satisfactory and continues to improve both in lessons and around the school. The school is generally calm and orderly. The vast majority of pupils behave sensibly round the school and are very courteous and friendly, both to adults and to each other. There are a few examples of boisterous behaviour during break and lunchtimes but nothing that causes pupils to feel unsafe in school. The number of fights has dropped greatly although there are records of infrequent fighting.

Improvements in behaviour are primarily due to the positive impact of the new behaviour management strategies that have been implemented since the previous visit. In particular, the new behaviour policy is making a difference. It sets out clearly the consequences for unacceptable behaviour and the rewards which will be gained by those who meet the school's expectations. Pupils say that the new system ensures that they are clearer about the results of poor behaviour. They believe that behaviour, in lessons in particular, has improved, leading to a much improved environment for learning. Positive behaviours have been encouraged by the rewards system, which is to be broadened to extend its appeal. The policy is not, however, consistently applied in all lessons.

The school's more effective management of behaviour and the resulting improvements are strongly demonstrated by a significant reduction in the number of fixed term exclusions over the course of the autumn term. Compared to the same period in the last academic year, exclusions have been reduced by 75%. Moreover, the number of pupils who are removed from a lesson is decreasing. This has been assisted by the effective use of the 'seclusion room'.

The leadership team's sensible decision to reorganise teaching groups in Year 8 from January 2009 is already resulting in a significant reduction in the number of pupils in this year group who are removed from lessons. However, there is some way to go in ensuring that all Year 8 pupils conform to the school's expectations of their behaviour.

Attendance in all year groups has improved since the last visit and is close to the national average across Years 7 to 11. Pupils are more aware of the importance of good attendance. This has been reinforced by systems which track pupils' attendance carefully and regularly and which lead to staged intervention, including

legal action, where poor attendance is persistent. Punctuality is variable across lessons and subjects. Where teachers have high expectations, pupils are punctual and the lesson gets off to a prompt start.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching has improved since the previous monitoring inspection. Considerably fewer of the lessons observed were judged to be inadequate and three outstanding lessons were seen. Good and outstanding lessons were characterised by a prompt start, and high expectations for learning and achievement were communicated from the outset. In these lessons, careful planning for the full range of learners enabled the needs of all pupils to be met. A suitably brisk pace was maintained throughout the lesson. Pupils responded well to the teacher and to each other, showing willingness to work together and to share ideas. Questioning was probing, giving teachers an insight into what pupils had and had not understood and helping pupils to extend their thinking. In the best lessons a very high level of challenge was evident, and pupils were given ample opportunity to work independently and in groups to strengthen their own knowledge and understanding. In the good and outstanding lessons there was a tangible sense of teamwork between pupils and teachers.

In the weakest lessons planning did not properly address the needs of any groups of learners. The teachers' expectations of pupils were too low, both in terms of behaviour and learning. During the course of the lesson teachers did not check whether pupils had understood what they were learning, so misconceptions were perpetuated. Because pupils were not engaged there was too much low level disruption which was insufficiently challenged by the teacher. The pace was slow and the use of time was poor.

Marking is too variable and does not regularly tell pupils how to improve their learning.

The school has introduced a range of suitable initiatives that are clearly focused on improving the quality of provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language and those who have learning difficulties. The impact of these initiatives is being carefully monitored by the senior leaders. There is an increased clarity about the identification of these learners and teachers are receiving accurate assessment information about pupils' current attainment levels and their needs. An increasing number of teachers are using this to inform their lesson planning. These teachers tailor activities, learning resources and their expectations according to pupils' individual circumstances, and use simple strategies such as explaining key subject vocabulary and checking pupils' understanding, which benefits all pupils. Many staff at all levels are keen to take new ideas on board and their increasingly close collaboration with other schools combined with the support from within the school is helping to improve their expertise. Leaders are aware that this is, as yet, too variable – too many teachers are still not making such adaptations to their lessons.

Procedures for inducting new pupils, assessing their needs and monitoring their progress are now significantly more systematic. Weekly meetings of the newly established 'inclusion forum' are effectively promoting communication and sharing of information within the school, as well as strengthening links with, and specialist input from, a range of other agencies.

Curriculum provision in Key Stage 3 has improved suitably as a result of changes introduced at the start of the present term and now better meets the learning needs of pupils. The amount of time allocated to the core subjects has been increased and statutory requirements for the provision of design technology are now met. Grouping arrangements have been revised so that, where appropriate, pupils are more suitably taught in ability groups. Importantly, the school timetable has been completely revised and staffing changes made so that very few staff now teach outside their specialist areas. Because of the nature of Key Stage 4 courses it is difficult to make substantial mid-year curriculum changes. Consequently appropriate plans are being formulated to increase the range and flexibility of option choices while at the same time providing guidance to ensure that the options pupils choose are suited to their needs. As part of these plans the weaknesses identified in provision for information and communication technology (ICT), and personal, social, health and economics education (PSHEE) are to be tackled from September 2009.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2008:

- Co-ordinate more effectively any additional support for students, especially those with learning difficulties and those with English as an additional language so that the curriculum meets their needs – satisfactory
- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least satisfactory or better – satisfactory

Leadership and management

The school is benefiting significantly from the executive headteacher's well focused and determined leadership. Since the previous monitoring inspection he has taken decisive and well-paced action to begin to remedy the widespread weaknesses identified by the section 5 report, the first monitoring inspection and his own accurate analysis. Staff have been made fully aware of the need for urgent improvement. The school's action plan is tightly focused on the school's priorities. Some of the actions taken, such as the reorganisation of the timetable, have had an immediate positive impact. Because almost all staff are teaching only their main subject their confidence and effectiveness have grown, which is evident in the improved quality of teaching observed during the inspection. Senior staff have been released from the responsibility of overseeing a year group, which has begun to enable them to be more focused on their strategic responsibilities. In some areas, such as the leadership of behaviour and attendance, of assessment, and of provision for learning difficulties and for English as an additional language, the impact of this

clear focus on improvement is substantial. Leaders of these areas understand what has improved and why, and have prioritised the next steps they need to take. Regular lesson observations are providing leaders and teachers with some useful information, however the purpose of each observation needs to be clarified and the format for recording differentiated accordingly.

The day to day management of the school has improved. The executive headteacher has implemented important processes such as the performance management of all staff. Crucially, a full review of the support staff structure is underway, focusing on the school's priorities. The 'on-call' system where senior and middle leaders quickly assist staff in classrooms if they are experiencing any difficulties is proving supportive to staff, and the deputy headteacher is monitoring thoroughly the use and impact of this system. The move to the new school has been systematically planned to minimise disruption to learning.

Middle leaders have been given a range of appropriate support to help them to begin to take suitable leadership and management roles. Some middle leaders have embraced the new expectations communicated to them by the executive headteacher, and the new opportunities given to them, however others have yet to grasp fully the extent of their role and their accountability. For example, some clearly understand their responsibility for supporting their team to manage pupils' behaviour and for modelling expectations in their own classrooms, and do so effectively, but others are still too reliant on senior leaders. Middle leaders' understanding of their role in monitoring and evaluating the progress of pupils in their subject is also too inconsistent. Senior leaders' line management of middle leaders is generally well focused on challenge and support but there is too much variability in practice, including in how good individual and departmental practice is identified and shared.

The executive headteacher has appreciated, and made the most of, the willing support being given by several local schools.

The IEB is working effectively to challenge and support the school. Meetings are well planned, well led, and very thorough, with a clear focus on achievement and standards. Importantly, middle leaders are being invited to meetings to make presentations to the IEB. This is valuable both to hold these leaders to account and to inform the IEB of improvements and key issues.

Progress on the areas for improvement identified by the inspection in April 2008:

- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously analyse the effectiveness of actions taken to improve students' learning and progress – satisfactory

External support

The LA has provided extensive support for the school. Its impact has been satisfactory overall. The impact of the work of the seconded or consultant senior

leaders working as part of the leadership team is good. The LA has set up suitable systems and structures to monitor the impact of its own support and is altering support appropriately according to the school's needs. The LA is aware of the need to ensure that improvement plans are streamlined and do not conflict. The LA is playing a suitable role in the IEB.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to identify, share and build upon good individual and departmental practice.
- Ensure that all staff are consistently meeting all new expectations.
- Ensure that all line managers consistently support and challenge middle leaders to carry out their responsibilities effectively in order to ensure that all pupils are making progress, and ensure that all meetings and agreed actions are clearly documented.