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Mr Mathew Atkinson  
St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe  
Garburn Place  
Newton Aycliffe  
County Durham  
DL5 7DE

Dear Mr Atkinson

**Special measures monitoring inspection of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Newton Aycliffe**

Following my visit to your school on 13–14 April 2016, 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 March 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all 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 Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## Annex

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2015.**

- Urgently improve the impact of leadership and management, including governance, by:
  - ensuring safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements
  - improving the rigour with which safeguarding incidents are tracked, monitored and reported and ensuring that all staff undertake regular safeguarding training and are confident in reporting incidents
  - ensuring that middle leaders monitor teaching and learning rigorously so that pupils' progress improves rapidly
  - enhancing action plans for further improvement and using them to hold staff rigorously accountable for pupils' progress
  - improving the effectiveness of the systems for managing the provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs
  - making certain that additional support for disadvantaged pupils, those who speak English as an additional language and pupils with disabilities and special educational needs has a positive impact on learning in all year groups
  - developing the skills of governors so that they are able to challenge the school using information on the performance of all pupils and make better checks on safeguarding procedures
  - improving the curriculum for safety so that pupils have better knowledge of how to stay safe online and of the basic laws in Britain
  - ensuring staff in the early years receive regular, effective training and opportunities for development
  - ensuring provision in the early years, and throughout the school, to support children who speak English as an additional language is checked carefully.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to make sure that all groups of pupils across all year groups make at least good progress, by:
  - ensuring that work is set at an appropriate level of difficulty so that all pupils including the most able are appropriately challenged
  - giving all pupils clear feedback on their work and ensuring they respond to teachers' comments
  - supporting those pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, within class, to close any gaps in their achievement with their peers and in comparison to national expectations
  - improving the quality of pupils' writing and their handwriting, particularly in Key Stage 2.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and safety by:
  - ensuring strategies to manage behaviour are applied consistently across the school and that the way teachers use these strategies to reduce low-level disruption in lessons is improved
  - improving systems for managing behaviour outside of lessons – responding promptly to pupils' concerns about name calling or bullying.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management can be improved.

## **Report on the third monitoring inspection on 13–14 April 2016**

### **Evidence**

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, governors, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese. In addition, an evaluation of recent information about the progress pupils make across the school was made and accuracy of assessment checked in pupils' books. Visits were made to all the classrooms to observe teaching, including joint observations in some lessons with the headteacher. Discussions were held with pupils in lessons and at playtimes and a selected group of pupils about the school. A review of information held about the views of parents including from Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, was also undertaken.

### **Context**

A new headteacher has been appointed. Three additional teachers have been appointed on temporary contracts. There has been a reduction in the number of teaching assistants.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

School leaders, including governors, have worked hard to ensure that leadership capacity in the school has been further strengthened. The appointment of a permanent headteacher and new arrangements with the previous executive headteacher have ensured that disruption is minimised and continuity maintained. The new headteacher, previously the acting head of school, has striven to ensure raised expectations about what pupils can achieve in an open, supportive and inclusive working environment. The impact of improved leadership arrangements has seen a change of culture in the school. Tough decisions have been taken to resolve staffing issues, including the appointment of additional teachers to minimise the impact of potential disruption in the provision of teaching and learning in the classroom. Temporary leadership roles have been put in place to cover the absence of the deputy headteacher and build on the strengths noted in the last inspection. As a consequence, school leaders have ensured that the drive for continuous improvement has been maintained. The impact of improvements are evident in the changing culture in the school, the ongoing improvements in teaching and learning, and the quality of provision in the early years. Where inconsistencies remain, plans are in place to address them.

Arrangements for safeguarding have been strengthened. Training has taken place for governors on the 'Prevent' duty and radicalisation awareness. Staff have reviewed serious incidents elsewhere to see what lessons can be learned, and school leaders have raised their own knowledge and engagement with the work and priorities of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Information provided for parents on the website has been simplified and made more accessible.

Governors continue to gain a greater knowledge and insight into the day-to-day life of the school. Frequent visits, meetings with staff and reviews of the school's actions ensure that they are well placed to ask questions and probe issues. Governors have focused on resolving staffing issues and ensuring the long-term financial stability and sustainability of the school. Staffing restructures and financial reviews have maintained a focus on securing outcomes in the classroom. In addition, action is now in hand to address the results of the review undertaken of how additional funding for disadvantaged pupils has been spent. While governors involved with the school scrutiny group have a secure strategic oversight of how the school is moving forward, the wider governing body does not provide sufficient scrutiny of this information to fully inform its decisions.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Evidence seen in the inspection matches that reported on following a recent local authority-led review of teaching and learning. Where staffing has been consistent, the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve, especially in the early years. Long-term absences have led to some disruption in teaching. School leaders have addressed this issue with the appointment of teachers on a temporary contract. A rigorous induction process has ensured that all new staff are fully aware of the expectations of them in the classroom. They have received training on planning, assessment and behaviour policies as well as safeguarding. They feel well supported and able to ask questions when needed. As a result, in the course of the inspection, recently appointed teachers were observed applying policies and approaches consistently. The impact of the new staffing arrangements are too recent to evaluate fully.

The provision in early years has seen a marked improvement. Children are clear about what is expected of them. Their play is purposeful and they stick with their tasks. Children play independently, supported by adults who intervene in a timely manner to ask questions, set challenges and redirect learning where necessary. Children apply themselves more confidently and, as a result, staff are able to work with small groups in a more sustained fashion and provide more intensive support to individuals. Early years staff have worked hard to embed a new assessment system to track the progress children make. They are realistic about children's starting points and make accurate assessments that inform their planning for the child's next steps. The early years leader acknowledges the role parents can play in the assessment process and has plans in place to address this. Some inconsistencies persist in the teaching of linking letters and the sounds they make (phonics).

Assessment systems are now fully in place. These provide information about how well individual pupils and key groups of pupils are progressing in reading, writing and mathematics. Assessments have been secured by comparing the pupils' work with those in other schools. As a result, most assessments are accurate but some lack accuracy, especially for the most-able pupils. As a consequence, not all planned learning has sufficient challenge. For example, in writing, the assessments do not fully reflect the transfer of writing skills and knowledge into other subject areas, and

some assessments are therefore overly generous. School leaders have plans in place to secure more detailed assessments for all other areas of the curriculum.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The improvements seen in behaviour on the last inspection are still evident. Pupils talk confidently about how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. Bullying is rare and when it does occur pupils are confident it will be dealt with promptly. Pupils are encouraged to move between lessons and playtimes in an orderly and timely fashion. As a result, they arrive in classrooms punctually and ready to learn. Lessons are characterised by a calm, quiet and purposeful atmosphere conducive to learning. Despite this, pupils report that, on occasions, there is still some silliness in lessons but this does not interfere with their work. A new system is in place to track behaviour and serious incidents. A key governor has been identified to oversee this work. As a result, school leaders have a firm understanding of how well behaviour is improving and what steps they need to take next to improve it further.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that pupils in most classes are now making rapid and sustained progress. They are beginning to make up the ground they had previously lost. The picture is, however, inconsistent. The progress in spelling, punctuation and grammar is not as strong as that seen in reading, writing and mathematics. In early years where teaching has improved, the teachers identify gaps in children's learning and plan to address them effectively. As a result, children are making quicker progress.

School leaders acknowledge that the faster rate of progress evident in performance information and pupils' work is still hampered by gaps in learning from previously inadequate teaching. As a result, some pupils do not achieve the standards they should.

Parents have increasing confidence that pupils are well taught and are making progress. In addition, the vast majority of those who responded would recommend this school to other parents.

### **External support**

The local authority and diocese have provided advice and guidance to governors on securing leadership capacity and the long-term financial stability of the school. They have also played a significant role in resolving complex staffing issues. The school scrutiny group, facilitated by the local authority, provides a close scrutiny on the developments in the school and evaluates the impact of the actions the school is taking. This function supports governors to potentially fulfil their role of having a strategic oversight of the quality of provision. In addition, the local authority has carried out a teaching and learning review and provided support in the early years.