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Mary Lynch
St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School
Beaufort Road
Erdington
Birmingham
West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Lynch

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary and St John Junior and Infant School

Following my visit with Beverly Petch, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 12 to 13 September 2018, 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 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 April 2017.

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 local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the

Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2017.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all leaders have a secure understanding of the school’s assessment system and how it can be used to inform teaching improvement
 - ensuring that leaders check that achievement information is reliable and analysed rigorously to identify which groups of pupils are not making sufficient progress
 - accelerating support for individual teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses and develop their practice quickly.
- Improve governance through:
 - securing a permanent school leadership structure
 - ensuring that leaders are held to account for the effective use of additional funding, including the pupil premium and sport premium.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information rigorously to check that pupils’ learning needs are met effectively
 - all adults develop and extend pupils’ language and comprehension skills
 - pupils in key stage 1 form letters accurately
 - pupils have a secure understanding of basic mathematical skills before being challenged with activities which require complex reasoning
 - vulnerable groups in all year groups are challenged effectively, including those pupils who are disadvantaged
 - children in the early years are given activities which challenge them more effectively and help them catch up with other children nationally.

An external review of governance and of the school’s use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 September 2018 to 13 September 2018

Evidence

My colleague and I met with parents at the start of the day and spoke to pupils throughout the inspection. We observed learning in most classes and looked at pupils' recent work in books. The headteacher accompanied me for all the visits that I made to lessons.

We met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and all members of the middle leadership team. I met with members of the governing body and with representatives from the multi-academy company who currently provide external support to the school. In addition, I met with a representative of the local authority and with a representative of the diocesan board.

I looked at various documents, including the school's action plans, assessment information, the school's monitoring of teaching and external reviews of the school's use of the pupil premium funding, and governance. I also checked the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staffing changes. You were appointed as headteacher from September 2017, along with a new deputy headteacher. Another permanent deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2018. After your appointment, but before you took up your post, you were involved in the recruitment of a middle leader who started at the school in September 2017. A new early years leader was appointed to start this term. These appointments have further strengthened the capacity of leadership. In addition, fast action has been taken to strengthen the governing body. Five new members have joined since the last inspection. Five new teachers joined the school in September 2017. Leaders are ensuring continuity of teaching for the one teaching post that is currently vacant.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

You have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's current position. Your evaluations reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the school and provide information about what needs to be done to raise standards and further improve the quality of teaching. Your leadership team understands and shares your vision for improvement. Each of you is determined to bring about rapid improvement and, together, you are highly ambitious for the success of the school.

The school's plan for improvement is detailed and it contains suitable actions to address each of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

However, it lacks specific, measurable success criteria. Adding these to the plan would allow leaders and governors to be more precise in their evaluations of the impact that any actions have had.

Although there has been a delay in joining the multi-academy company, since you became headteacher you have worked collaboratively with the leaders of the company and have established excellent working relationships. There is no doubt that support provided through this partnership has already brought about improvements in the quality of leadership, governance, pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching. There is a firm proposal in place for the school's transition to academy status. It is expected to happen soon.

Leaders have strengthened the assessment systems used to monitor and evaluate the progress that pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers and leaders meet each half term to talk about pupils' progress, including a focus both on individual pupils and vulnerable groups, including disadvantaged pupils. Teachers in all year groups take part in external moderation activities with other schools. The local authority agreed that the school's assessments of children's attainment in the early years last year were accurate. As a result, leaders, including governors, are confident that teachers' assessments are accurate. Leaders' termly presentations to governors contain detailed assessment information, with a focus on pupils' progress. Governors understand the information that leaders share and are able to provide a greater level of challenge than in the past.

All members of the senior and middle leadership team, including the recently appointed early years leader, understand their roles and responsibilities. You ensure that there is a tight focus on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. It is this focus, on developing the skills of all leaders, which is securing the improved direction of the school. For example, the deputy headteachers have worked to improve the quality of teaching in English and mathematics. They support individual teachers to achieve this. Support includes sharing good practice and providing clear feedback to teachers about how to improve. Where this has been most successful, the school's monitoring evidence shows how individual teachers have acted on the advice and how the quality of their teaching has improved over the last year. As a result, pupils in some year groups are now making better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you recognise that there are still some aspects of teaching that do not promote learning effectively. Therefore, in other year groups pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable.

As soon as you became headteacher, you arranged an external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding. Actions, including specific interventions, tracking the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and appointing a governor with oversight of pupil premium spending have begun to have a positive impact. Funding is more closely aligned to the learning needs of disadvantaged pupils, and you also ensure that there is support for social and emotional needs. However, in some year

groups and at the end of key stage 2 disadvantaged pupils are still not making the progress that is needed to help them to catch up with other pupils nationally.

Governors demonstrate high levels of commitment to the school and are determined to bring about improvement. They engage well with the wider school community, including parents. Leaders at all levels present the impact of their actions directly to the governing body. This includes the leader responsible for the physical education and sport premium funding, which is now used effectively. Governors have the depth of understanding required to hold leaders to account. They ask searching and challenging questions. The report from the recently completed review of governance recognises that governance is improving. It confirms that new members have strengthened capacity and capability. For example, there are now members of the governing body who can check information about the school's performance and hold leaders to account. The review identified further areas for improvement that include governors checking on the actions that leaders are taking to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching is improving throughout the school. Teachers are making better use of assessment information to meet the needs of the pupils in their class. However, inconsistencies remain. As a result, in some year groups pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable in reading, writing and mathematics. While the level of challenge is appropriate for many pupils, work in their books shows there is insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Often pupils must wait for everyone to complete a task before they can move on. This limits opportunities for the most able pupils to make the strong progress needed to reach the higher standards at the end of key stage 2.

Leaders have introduced daily reading lessons that focus on the development of comprehension skills. Teachers choose high-quality texts and there are purposeful opportunities to explore vocabulary and improve pupils' understanding of language. Texts are often linked to topics in the curriculum. This helps to develop pupils' knowledge of the topics that they are studying. However, some of the activities that pupils complete during the reading lessons are too easy and do not develop pupils' comprehension skills well enough. As a result, pupils are unable to tackle more challenging questions that require them to demonstrate how well they have understood the text that they have read.

There is secure evidence that pupils have a good grasp of basic mathematical skills. Pupils' books show that they successfully apply calculation strategies when solving problems. Additionally, there is increasing evidence that pupils can use mathematical reasoning in their work. For example, through proving why an answer is correct. However, pupils' books also show that sometimes they spend too much time practising calculations when they have already shown they can complete them successfully. Leaders know that there is more work to be done to ensure that the

most able pupils are consistently challenged.

Teachers and teaching assistants are increasingly insistent that pupils in key stage 1 form letters correctly. Dedicated time is made for handwriting lessons and pupils' books show that they are trying very hard to write letters correctly. Occasionally, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils when they write in subjects other than English. Additionally, a small number of adults do not set the best example, as they do not model accurate letter formation.

'Learning journey' books show that children in Reception experience a broad curriculum. However, assessment information shows that too many children do not build well on their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. A new leader of early years has been appointed. Changes have been made to the timetable to ensure that there is greater focus on the important basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders have raised the expectation of how well pupils will behave. Pupils have responded positively to this and are usually well behaved in the classroom and as they move around the school. Pupils are welcoming and polite to visitors and they demonstrate good manners. Pupils are consulted about the rules through their class school council member. Pupils who spoke to inspectors say that they understand the rules and that most pupils follow them.

Adults receive training on managing behaviour, and this ensures a consistent approach. In a small number of classes, pupils took longer than others to settle down to work. However, this was because of some teachers not being well prepared rather than pupils seeking to misbehave. Leaders are aware of the teachers who need support to further improve their class management skills.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Generally, they listen carefully when someone else is talking, cooperate well with one another and enjoy being praised for trying their best. Most pupils take care with the presentation of their work.

Attendance is below the national average but is getting better. Leaders track attendance efficiently and make sure that fast action is taken to follow up absence. The school holds special assemblies to celebrate good and improving attendance. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced because of the focus on attendance. Leaders work closely with the families of the pupils who are persistently absent, but they recognise there is further work to do.

Pupils reported that they feel safe in school. They know how to stay safe online, they are aware of the danger that strangers can pose and they know what to do if they think that they or someone they know is being bullied. They are confident that the adults in school will be able to help with any problems that they have.

Outcomes for pupils

Following the last inspection, standards at the end of key stage 2 declined further and pupils' progress in all subjects in 2017 was well below that of pupils nationally with the same starting points. However, unvalidated information for 2018 shows an improvement in attainment and progress. Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics remains low, but there are significant improvements in writing. This is a result of teachers' higher expectations of the amount and quality of writing that pupils will produce. Disadvantaged pupils made much better progress in 2018 compared with the previous year. However, they did not achieve as well as other pupils in school or nationally in reading, writing and mathematics.

The proportion of children attaining a good level of development at the end of the early years remains below the national average. Last year the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the phonics screening check increased. However, this too remains below the national figure. In key stage 1, a greater proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in writing, but fewer did so in reading. Leaders know that they must focus on further development of pupils' comprehension skills.

External support

Support from external partners is effective and has helped lead to the improvements noted above. The support commissioned by the archdiocese comes from the John Paul II multi-academy company. An officer commissioned through the local authority makes termly visits to the school to check the school's progress. The key areas of focus have been strengthening governance, the development of senior and middle leadership, improving the quality of teaching and ensuring consistency in behaviour management. Last academic year the headteacher of a teaching school worked alongside the headteacher of St Mary and St John to provide advice and guidance. The archdiocese and the local authority consider that the leadership team is now less reliant on external support while this partnership remains in place.