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27 February 2019

Mr Matthew White
Executive Headteacher
St Ambrose Catholic Primary School
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Dear Mr White

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Ambrose Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12–13 February 2019, 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 March 2018.

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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection, up to a maximum of one in key stage 1 and one in key stage 2.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director

of children's services for Liverpool. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in March 2018.

- Take urgent action to improve outcomes in English for pupils in key stage 2 and in English and mathematics for pupils in key stage 1 by ensuring that:
 - progress in reading for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is increased rapidly so that it is at least in line with other pupils nationally by the end of Year 6
 - the most able pupils make strong progress, so that a greater proportion attain greater depth and the higher standards by the end of Year 2 and Year 6
 - the proportion of pupils achieving the Year 1 phonics screening check at least matches the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by making sure that:
 - teachers assess pupils' progress accurately across a range of subjects
 - leaders' and teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high enough
 - teachers plan learning that provides enough challenge to enable the most able pupils to achieve higher standards
 - pupils' progress in science is properly assessed and monitored and the inequalities between disadvantaged pupils and others nationally in this subject are diminished.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors hold leaders properly to account for pupils' outcomes and the quality of education that pupils receive
 - the curriculum equips pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need across a range of subjects to enable them to be successful in the next stage of their education
 - leaders rapidly devise and implement assessment systems that focus on pupils' progress as well as attainment, so that all pupils reach their potential across the curriculum
 - when leaders check the quality of teaching, they focus on its impact on the progress of all pupils and the extent to which teaching is enabling all groups to achieve well
 - middle leaders have the time and the professional development opportunities that they need in order to have the necessary impact on pupils' learning

- governors and leaders prevent discrimination and prejudice by promoting protected characteristics of individuals under the Equalities Act 2010.
- Ensure that pupils get the maximum possible benefit from being in school by reducing the percentage of pupils who are absent, especially those who are persistently absent.

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

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 12 February 2019 to 13 February 2019

Evidence

The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes by making visits jointly with the executive headteacher and with the acting deputy headteacher. He spoke with more than 30 parents throughout the inspection. The inspector reviewed information from a recent school survey of the views of parents and carers of the school. He spoke with pupils in classrooms and around the site. The inspector met with a random sample of 10 pupils from key stage 2 to discuss their learning and their views of the school. He met with senior leaders to discuss improvement, including in mathematics and English. He looked at a range of leaders' plans and reviews of the school. The inspector met with the leaders for equalities, science, geography and history. He considered examples of pupils' work in mathematics, English, history and geography. The inspector looked at displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors.

The inspector met with two officers from Liverpool local authority and one from Liverpool archdiocese, who are supporting the school. He met with three governors, including the interim chair of governors. One of these governors is the national leader of governance who recently undertook the external review of governance.

The inspector checked the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils.

Context

The executive headteacher joined the school in May 2018. He is also the headteacher of another school but spends most of his time at St Ambrose. An acting deputy headteacher joined the school full time from September 2018. Part of her role is to lead mathematics. At the time of the current inspection, the assistant headteacher was not at the school. All members of the governing body are new since the previous inspection, led by an interim chair of governors.

There are no arrangements in place to change the school to an academy in the near future.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The executive headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have set the school on a clear path of improvement. They have won the support of pupils, parents and staff. Pupils spoke highly of the executive headteacher; for example, one said that their proudest moment over the past year was 'being told by the headteacher that there was a big, positive difference in me'. This indicates the positive shift in the work of the school. Leaders have raised expectations of pupils among members of staff. Relationships between leaders, staff, pupils and parents have improved significantly.

Senior leaders are creating a genuine belief among all involved that St Ambrose can and will improve.

Senior leaders have strengthened the quality of support, training and advice for staff. Teachers have access to support aimed at addressing their individual needs. Staff told the inspector that in the past they accessed limited training and professional development, but now they feel respected because senior leaders have made training a priority. Staff said that senior leaders communicate well with them, give direction to their work and ensure greater consistency in how they teach.

Parents commented often to the inspector during the inspection that new senior leaders are approachable and available at the school gate or at other times. They said that senior leaders listen and respond to any concerns raised. They said that senior leaders now communicate much more effectively with parents about the work of the school. Nonetheless, some parents would like even more contact with the school about the curriculum.

Leaders have established proper plans to improve the school. The actions that they have identified are clear and realistic. Leaders, governors and the local authority are regularly evaluating the school's progress against the agreed priorities.

Senior leaders have introduced clear new arrangements to check on the work of the staff across subjects. This means, for example, that the executive headteacher has a clear knowledge of the quality of teaching in the school. Even so, middle leaders' influence on the work of the staff is at the early stages of development.

The external review of the pupil premium funding was thorough and detailed. Senior leaders have adapted their strategy for using pupil premium funding, based on the review's findings. However, the review was not conducted until mid-November 2018 and it is therefore too soon to see its impact on the work of the school.

There has been much change in the membership of the governing body over the past year. The governing body now includes much-needed expertise. Governors are reviewing and challenging the work of the school with more precision. However, the external review of governance only reported its findings in late January 2019. The delay in commissioning the review did not help the school. Nevertheless, the clear priorities set out by the review are of immediate benefit to strengthening the work of the governing body.

Leaders, governors and staff have addressed the previous weakness of the school in teaching pupils about equality under the Equality Act 2010. Pupils with whom the inspector spoke have a convincing understanding of protected characteristics, including disability, race, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. Leaders and staff are acting to improve this aspect of the school even further.

Leaders and staff have made the school curriculum more worthwhile, for instance selecting specific trips in the school grounds or across the north-west region to develop pupils' knowledge. Leaders and staff are linking closely with another school to strengthen the curriculum at St Ambrose further this term.

Leaders have made certain that the safeguarding of pupils at the school continues to be effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The executive headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have given much support, advice and training to staff to develop their skills and knowledge. Teachers and teaching assistants are developing higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff give much more consideration to what pupils need to know and whether planned activities will help pupils to achieve. As a result, the teaching of reading, writing, mathematics and science is improving. Pupils from key stage 2 told the inspector that mathematics teaching has improved this year. As one said: 'It's harder, so it's more fun.'

Staff are making more accurate use of assessment information about pupils, for example to refine teaching during lessons. Teachers are planning pupils' activities more carefully. For example, they are teaching the science national curriculum more fully and in more worthwhile ways. This is helping pupils to develop better investigative skills. From their checks on the work of staff, leaders know that there is still some weak teaching in the school. They continue to act to address this further. Staff are giving better consideration to the needs of the most able pupils. Nevertheless, in some activities staff do not challenge pupils enough. Classrooms and corridors are attractive places to study and learn. Staff take pride in creating displays that celebrate, support and stimulate pupils' learning.

In the early years, staff help children to learn and use new language. For example, children delighted in using words such as 'mud' and 'stumble' as they read and acted out the story of 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt'. With enthusiasm and skill, they then wrote words from the story when retelling the exciting events which they had rehearsed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils show respect for differences between themselves and other people. They told the inspector that they are delighted with the many changes that the executive headteacher and deputy headteacher have created in the school. They said that leaders recognise when pupils try hard or achieve well. Pupils said that this encouragement and acknowledgement was enhancing their attitudes towards the school. Pupils' improving handwriting shows their increasing pride in their work.

During the inspection, pupils' behaviour was consistently positive. They acted sensibly and safely when moving around the premises. Even when teaching was not closely meeting their needs, pupils remained polite and sensible, but their attention inevitably wandered.

Pupils arrive at school punctually and ready for lessons. Pupils attending the breakfast club come early to school, full of enthusiasm for their extra activities. While the overall attendance of pupils is average, the persistent absence of some pupils is still too high. Leaders are determined to eradicate this issue, and a range of worthwhile actions are in place, but there is some way to go before this is achieved.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils told the inspector that they are becoming more skilful and confident in their learning. For example, in mathematics, they are developing greater confidence to solve problems for themselves. They said that the better mathematics teaching is helping to deepen their thinking. Pupils are developing much greater enjoyment and confidence in reading. Boys are much more engaged in reading than in the past and gaining stronger reading skills in key stages 1 and 2. In Year 1, pupils are developing greater confidence in their phonics skills.

Recent changes in assessments of pupils mean that it is too soon for leaders to have enough information to demonstrate that the standards attained by pupils are rising. Leaders do not have enough information to indicate that differences between groups of pupils are diminishing. Nevertheless, pupils, including the most able, are beginning to make better progress in English, mathematics and science than in the past. This is because the quality of teaching is improving.

The published outcomes for pupils in 2018 indicate that pupils in key stage 2 made average progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils' attainment of at least the expected standards in key stage 2 was average in reading, above average in mathematics but below average in writing. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics combined was below average, as was the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. In science, pupils' attainment in key stage 1 and 2 was weak. Pupils' attainment in key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics remained below average. In Year 1, pupils' ability to read unfamiliar words in the phonics screening check was below average.

External support

Local authority officers are working closely with leaders and governors and keeping a close check on improvement at St Ambrose. The support which they are giving makes a valuable difference to the work of the school. Training provided by the local authority is helping to improve staff expertise across the curriculum.

The local authority and the archdiocese worked together closely to set up the arrangements for school leadership from an executive headteacher. They have made certain that arrangements are in place for this work to continue. Each school has agreed that the executive headteacher remains in the role until August 2020.