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Mr Dominic Hemington
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Dear Mr Hemington

Special measures monitoring inspection of St John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 and 4 October 2017, 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 fourth monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in April 2016. 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.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion to recommend that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim management board and the chair of the Executive Trust Board, the director of education for the Diocese of Shrewsbury, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sue Eastwood
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in April 2016.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - systematically and rigorously evaluating the impact of actions to improve pupils' learning, particularly those relating to improving outcomes for disadvantaged and most-able pupils
 - sharply focusing the evaluation of teaching on the impact it has on pupils' learning and systematically checking that areas for improvement have been acted upon effectively
 - improving the quality and breadth of information received by the governing body and multi-academy trust so that they are better equipped to hold leaders to account
 - improving the quality of middle leadership and more rigorously holding them to account to ensure they have best impact on securing improvement in their areas of responsibility
 - developing the rigour and accuracy of the school's self-evaluation
 - raising governors' expectations of the outcomes for pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged and those most able
 - ensuring teachers use accurate assessment to plan appropriately challenging work for the most able, including those who are disadvantaged
 - ensuring teachers adhere to the school's policies on teaching, including those relating to feedback and marking
 - developing teachers' subject knowledge of special educational needs and the new national curriculum.
- Improve the outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring the most able receive sufficient challenge and guidance to reach their full potential
 - ensuring appropriate and sharply focused support for disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, so they close the gaps with other pupils nationally and their peers in school
 - reducing the persistent absence of disadvantaged pupils further
 - continuing to enhance the quality of teaching in early years, particularly of

core mathematical and English skills, so greater proportions of children reach a good level of development.

External reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the fourth monitoring inspection on 3 October 2017 to 4 October 2017

Evidence

During this inspection, HMI held meetings with the headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, and the two assistant headteachers, one of whom was new to the school. She also met with the person responsible for special educational needs and disabilities, a group of curriculum leaders, a member of staff responsible for attendance and the person responsible for maintaining the single central record for safeguarding. HMI had a discussion with two members of the interim management board and met with the consultant headteacher commissioned to support the leadership of the school, as well as a representative of the local authority. The inspector met 10 pupils to discuss the changes that have happened in the school since the previous inspection. HMI visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work. She looked at documents, including: information about pupils' achievement; school self-evaluation; the school development plan; planning and monitoring files; and documents relating to attendance and safeguarding.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, three new teachers have been appointed to replace those that have left. All these appointments are permanent; they all took up post in September 2017. One of these teachers also joins the leadership team as an assistant headteacher.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

It is clear from this monitoring inspection that the pace of improvement continues to be sustained. Effective action has been taken by the headteacher and interim management board to establish a permanent staff team for the start of the new academic year. These staff have been inducted well and have made a good start. Consequently, they are already beginning to demonstrate the consistency of practice and high expectation for pupils that were previously lacking. For the first time since the school was placed in special measures there is the opportunity to sustain and build on the significant school improvement taking place.

Staff morale is high. The negative feelings they have had about being in special measures are in the past and a 'buzz' for learning and school improvement is now increasingly evident across the school. The headteacher continues to take a confident and resolute lead. The acting deputy headteacher is an asset both in terms of her commitment and drive to improve the school. The senior leadership team is now complemented by two very able assistant headteachers, one temporary and one permanent. Together, this senior leadership team are in an excellent position to ensure that improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and

standards are embedded and permanent. The headteacher and interim management board are determined that the acting deputy and assistant headteacher roles will become permanent as soon as possible.

The acting deputy headteacher, who is a strong classroom practitioner, has been released from her teaching responsibilities this term to offer intensive coaching to the new teaching staff. This is already having a positive effect on the continuity of teaching approaches across the school. The continuation of this strategy and the release of the new assistant headteacher to support the development of mathematics in school is a sensible approach to improving teaching even more.

Self-evaluation is now a regular and natural part of the leadership team's processes. For example, as soon as results were available for the end of key stage 2, leaders made a thorough and comprehensive analysis and evaluation. The follow-up actions were incisive and implemented swiftly. All four members of the leadership team continue to ensure that there is a manageable, rigorous approach to activities such as monitoring of pupils' work, the implementation of strategies and observing teaching and learning. These activities are completed regularly and fed back to staff for their continuing development. Staff are now much more receptive to the feedback they are given and keen to use it to improve their teaching and learning practice.

With a permanent staff team, the foundations are in place for curriculum leaders to have more impact. They are enthusiastic and keen to be accountable for their areas of responsibility. All have position statements and have written action plans. They are each given time to be released from their teaching commitments to work on their subject and are involved in scrutiny of pupils' work and of teachers' planning. Some curriculum leaders are preparing to give an account of their subject to the interim management board. This is envisaged to become a regular expectation, particularly when assessment information on the progress that pupils are making in each subject is established later this term.

The interim management board continues to grow in effectiveness. The local authority has stepped down the support it offers in the knowledge that the group is self-sufficient. Board members are supportive but appropriately challenging. They are insistent on high expectations and suitably demanding of leaders. They increasingly recognise the strength and robustness of the senior leadership team and see themselves as working alongside leaders more, rather than needing to be forthright in their expectations of school improvement and ensuring the best for pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Early years staff have continued to embed the changes made to the provision since the previous monitoring visit. In the Nursery, activities, both indoors and outdoors, are well organised, exciting and used very well by children. All activities are themed

around a picture book: in this instance, 'Owl babies' by Martin Waddell, which has captured children's imagination. Routines have been quickly established for children who are very young and experiencing school for the first time. There is some continuity between provision in Nursery and Reception classes. For example, learning journeys are of the same good quality. Activities are arranged around the theme of a story or picture book. However, purposeful, well-organised opportunities to learn outdoors are not as evident in Reception. In Reception, space is tighter than in Nursery, activities are still not as accessible to children as they could be and the free flow around the room is stilted.

Teaching and learning across the school are continuing to improve. There are now strengths in upper key stage 2 and in key stage 1. Permanent staff have been appointed to Years 3 and 4. The coaching model adopted by the school is essential to ensure that these teachers rapidly gain the confidence and skills needed. This will ensure that the gap in quality of teaching and learning across the school is finally closed.

Improvements in the teaching of writing have been sustained and built upon across the school. Teachers expect more of pupils' writing, so that writing is good in all subjects, not just in English. For example, pupils are expected to regularly complete, and are assessed on, an extended piece of writing in science and in a humanities subject. The whole school curriculum has been revised. Learning across the curriculum for a half term is now based around a story, text or picture book. This has provided enhanced opportunities for pupils to write and to be immersed in literature, giving them a purpose for writing and a deeper understanding and enjoyment of what they are writing about.

At the previous monitoring inspection, mathematics was underdeveloped. A new strategy for delivering the subject had only just been implemented and staff were insecure. However, after a period of intensive focus it is pleasing to see that staff are now much more confident in this new approach. There is a consistency across the whole school in delivery and the vocabulary used. Most teachers feel confident about this new way of working and in turn pupils are adapting well to the expectations that they should think of a variety of ways to solve mathematical problems. All pupils are also consistently using 'fix-it' time to respond to the feedback of teachers and learn from their mistakes. Some good practitioners of mathematics are now emerging. They are skilful at using the school strategy adopted to get the best from pupils, and in turn pupils are responding with enthusiasm and a deeper understanding. In the best lessons, teachers are confident to set appropriate challenge for the most able pupils, ensuring that they are stretched and extended. They are also adept at getting pupils to explain their learning, both verbally and in writing. Leaders recognise where practice and confidence still needs to be developed and are committed to ensuring that all teachers are as self-assured as the best.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Attendance overall has improved to well above national average because of the hard work of leaders and staff to set up a robust system to monitor absence. Leaders have continued to be effective at further reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent, including those pupils who are disadvantaged. As a result, the school recorded an end of year absence figure which is well below the national average. The school has developed a no-nonsense approach to absence and an expectation that all pupils will attend. Where pupils are struggling, staff pick this up quickly and put firm but supportive strategies in place to get pupils rapidly back on track. For example, there were a small number of pupils with around 85% attendance in the first week of school. This was picked up quickly, and every subsequent week of this term, all these pupils have had full attendance. Leaders continue to turn their attention to pupils that are late for school. The doors are open earlier for the start of the school day and teachers have the chance to chat with pupils in the classrooms. The doors shut promptly and all late arrivals must now come through the front entrance. Leaders are monitoring the effectiveness of this approach, which is expected to encourage pupils to be in school promptly.

Behaviour and conduct around school continue to be positive. Pupils show a good attitude to learning in key stage 1, and a very positive attitude in upper key stage 2. The clarity of teaching, strong subject knowledge and sureness in what is being taught, alongside pupils' confidence in using and applying their skills, ensure that pupils are highly engaged and motivated to learn. In lower key stage 2, pupils are willing and eager to learn but teachers do not give as precise instructions or explanations as they could. As a result, pupils occasionally lack direction and are hesitant to get on with their work because they are unsure of what they need to do, or they are over-directed and so are not encouraged to think things out for themselves.

Following the last monitoring inspection, leaders reviewed the pastoral system and the informal personal, social and emotional aspects of school. As a result, they have revamped the head boy and girl roles; the school council is now a pupils' parliament; house captains are required to write speeches and be elected by their peers; and 'friendship buddies' are offered weekly training and opportunities to talk through any support they have given to pupils. The use of 'buddies' has noticeably improved the playtime experience for some pupils. For example, during the monitoring visit, HMI saw a 'buddy' go over to a pupil and put his arm around him and ask him if he could help. Another pupil, seeing a child storm off upset, went over to him to check if he was all right.

Some pupils indicated at the last monitoring visit that staff did not always listen to their concerns. In response, leaders have created a system for pupils to indicate how they feel each morning by placing their peg on an emoji situated in the classroom. This is valuable information for the school and can help staff explore ways of addressing barriers to learning such as tiredness, which is an emoji that

many pupils are currently identifying. It is now important that there is a consistent way of responding to pupils when they put a peg on 'sad', 'worried' or 'angry'. This would ensure that pupils feel valued and listened to as well as providing an opportunity for staff to offer social and emotional support to pupils who need it. To this end, leaders are already exploring the possibilities of bringing various members of staff together to form a pastoral team. They will oversee all aspects of the good social and emotional development of pupils in school.

Pupils who spoke to the inspector were very clear about the improvements that had gone on in school. They were keen to describe their lessons as 'more exciting' and 'effective'. Pupils said they had to 'work harder' and make their 'handwriting neater'. Pupils are also enjoying the new 'dojo' reward system. Pupils particularly like it when parents get a text when they have done well in school. When asked what they would still like to see improved, they were unanimous in saying that they would like the 'playground fixed as soon as possible'.

Outcomes for pupils

The use and gathering of assessment information is more embedded across school. Teachers use the information increasingly well to plan for pupils' next steps in learning. Leaders analyse assessment data meticulously and are quick to follow up if needed. For example, leaders made immediate changes based on their analysis of outcomes in writing at the end of each key stage. This was quickly followed up by a monitoring and moderation exercise with the consultant headteacher to see that the actions taken were effective.

The whole-school assessment system is now reliable and accurate. It is regularly checked through moderation activities within school and with other schools. The school has also been subject to moderation from the local authority. This information clearly indicates that pupils across school are now making better progress. This is particularly evident in key stage 1 and upper key stage 2. Progress is less evident in lower key stage 2 because of poor teaching in the recent past. It is also important to remember that although pupils are making progress, many key stage 2 pupils began from low starting points due to underachievement across the school. This is not the case now in key stage 1 and in the new Year 3 cohort, but elsewhere there is still a need to accelerate learning to ensure that pupils are meeting and exceeding the expectations appropriate for their age. This is particularly pertinent for the current Year 4 and Year 5 cohorts, who urgently need to accelerate their progress if they are going to reach their potential at the end of key stage 2.

End of key stage results for 2017 were very positive at the end of Reception and key stage 1. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development has steadily increased from under half to well over half in 2017. This places the school close to the national average for the first time. At the end of key stage 1, pupils exceeded the national figures in reading, writing and mathematics combined and in

each individual subject. Similarly, pupils exceeded national averages for pupils attaining greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics combined and in each individual subject.

End of key stage 2 results were disappointing, with pupils attaining below national average figures in reading, writing and mathematics combined and all individual subjects at expected standards. Pupil outcomes were comparable to national average outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics combined at higher standards and slightly above national average figures in grammar, spelling and punctuation. As a cohort, pupils did make some accelerated progress in all subjects, but past underachievement meant that some pupils were not able to attain to their potential. Leaders are not complacent and were very quick to get a deeper understanding of why pupils did not reach the targets leaders had set. Leaders are confident that the 2017 cohort group will be the last that achieve below national standards.

External support

The school continues to benefit from external support but it is noticeable that now there are more skilled practitioners in school, an increasing amount of school improvement and development is in-house. This is particularly the case in the up-skilling of new teaching staff. External support that is provided is still valued and managed appropriately by senior leaders and the interim management board to ensure that it is of a high quality and not overwhelming. Consideration is given to ensuring that strategies that are implemented are given time to embed. The consultant headteacher offers excellent support and is highly valued and respected in school for her knowledge and leadership skills. The local authority continues to maintain a good relationship with the school and offer useful and helpful support. This has reduced to match the school's increasing independence.