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Hilary Dunford
Headteacher
St Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Primary School
Pennywell Road
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Dear Miss Dunford

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Nicholas of Tolentine Catholic Primary School

Following my visit with Dale Burr, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 15 and 16 June 2021, 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 October 2018. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

Having considered 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 the evidence, I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the director of education for the Diocese of Clifton, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 June 2021

Context

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the school's progress in developing the areas for improvement highlighted at the school's previous section 5 inspection. Leaders rightly changed priorities so that the focus for staff was to support children and their families. Consequently, the school's work to improve the quality of education has slowed.

The deputy headteacher is currently not at work. A member of staff is currently acting deputy headteacher. An additional governor has been appointed to the governing body.

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

The headteacher and her team work with determination as they continue to tackle the school's weaknesses. There is a real sense of moving forward together towards a shared goal. Governors contribute well to this team effort. They understand the current challenges and have an accurate understanding of the key areas that still need to improve. They play their part in ensuring that the school's action plans steer the work of leaders so that the school continues to improve.

The designated leader for safeguarding has maintained the school's focus on ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Concerns are reported quickly, and leaders involve other professionals appropriately to protect children and their families. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding continues to check agreed procedures, such as for the recruitment of staff.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are improving. Leaders work with integrity, ensuring that each pupil's individual barriers and challenges are thought about and solutions found. Staff have high expectations of how pupils should behave. Most pupils move calmly and sensibly around the school and settle quickly to their learning. Staff continue to help those pupils who still struggle with behaviour. However, pupils told inspectors that although they can see improvements being made, they do not always feel safe when in school.

Leaders are committed to creating a strong reading culture in the school. As a result, reading rightly remains a key priority. Pupils across the school now read more widely and often and have high-quality books read to them. Teachers and teaching assistants across the school promote reading well. They enjoy reading stories, information texts and poems and do this with enthusiasm during story times.

In the Reception class, communication and language is rightly prioritised. Staff in the early years use assessment well to show them the learning experiences that children need next. Children learn traditional stories, songs and rhymes alongside a structured phonics programme. In Years 1 and 2, phonics and early reading are led well and organised effectively. For pupils starting to read, staff choose books that match the sounds that pupils know. Staff ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who need to catch up are given precise phonics teaching and read with an adult more often. Leaders have used catch-up funding wisely, providing additional teaching for pupils who are significantly behind. Small group reading and writing lessons with a catch-up teacher support these pupils well.

The writing curriculum is less well developed and not organised with enough detail. As a result, pupils do not have the knowledge they need to write well or have the practice they need to get better. Pupils' books show that many continue to have gaps in their writing development and that standards remain low in most classes. Through monitoring, the subject leader has already identified this as a priority for the school.

The development of the mathematics curriculum is more advanced. There is a learning structure which ensures that mathematical knowledge is sequenced well across the school. However, pupils' books show that many pupils still have significant gaps in their mathematical understanding. Teachers are rightly emphasising problem-solving and mathematical fluency to help pupils to catch up.

Leaders continue work to improve the school's wider curriculum. Many planned actions have been delayed this year. However, subject leaders have worked with a curriculum consultant to design new plans in history and geography. These are currently being finalised. Leaders are aware that this is a key priority in securing improvements to the quality of education.

Because of restrictions due to COVID-19, the special educational needs coordinator has not checked to see whether agreed learning strategies are having the intended impact on pupils' progress. However, learning plans for pupils with SEND do identify precise next steps for improvement. Learning diaries help some pupils with complex needs see what they have learned and help to celebrate this.

There is more to do to improve pupils' attendance, which is still too low. In particular, punctuality is a problem still to be solved. Too many pupils arrive late to school and therefore miss crucial phonics and reading lessons. This holds pupils back from becoming successful readers, which has an impact on their learning across the whole curriculum.

Additional support

Curriculum leaders appreciate the time they have had with an external consultant in developing the school's curriculum. This has enabled leaders to reflect on what key knowledge is needed and how to sequence and structure planning across the school.

The school has received leadership support from a local multi-academy trust. As a small school with few staff, this is helpful in ensuring a wide range of advice and guidance is available to all staff.

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, acting deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders, pupils, parents and staff. They also met with two representatives of those responsible for governance, including one who also represents the diocese.