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Mrs Helen Murden
St Matthew's RC High School
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Dear Mrs Murden

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Matthew's RC High School

Following my visit with David Hampson, Ofsted Inspector to your school on 15 and 16 January 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 November 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 newly qualified teachers (NQTs) before the next monitoring inspection. I recommend that any such NQTs are supported with high-quality professional development provided by the national teaching school currently supporting the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the director of education for the Diocese of Salford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Manchester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Gregory
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Rapidly improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that senior leaders assess the quality of teaching at the school accurately so that they can plan the improvements that are urgently required
 - ensuring that school leaders monitor and assess plans regularly and accurately in order to check that improvements are rapid and secure
 - sharpening governors' understanding and analysis of the information that they are given so that they can hold leaders to account more effectively for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
 - ensuring that the leadership of teaching, including subject leadership, is more effective so that current weaknesses are addressed rapidly and sustainably
 - providing Year 7 pupils who are eligible for the literacy and numeracy catch-up funding with the support that they are entitled to
 - reviewing the subjects that pupils are taught so that they all follow courses that meet their needs and interests
 - ensuring that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is managed effectively so that these pupils make the same progress as others nationally
 - ensuring that the leadership of mathematics is effective so that the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes improve rapidly
 - ensuring that the additional funding used to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) continues to improve their progress, especially in mathematics.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - further raising expectations of pupils' behaviour so that their conduct around school is consistently good
 - further increasing the regular attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND so that it is at least in line with other pupils nationally
 - insisting that pupils' conduct in lessons is consistently good so that they make the progress that they should.
- Urgently improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - setting challenging work that takes account of pupils' starting points and previous learning so that pupils, including those who are most able, make the progress that they should

- making it clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their learning and providing them with the opportunities to do so routinely
- sharpening the planning and use of questioning so that pupils think, respond and learn with more precision, depth and detail
- ensuring that teachers routinely share high expectations of pupils' work with them so that pupils are challenged to achieve high standards
- ensuring that teaching is consistently strong in order to secure the rapid increase in outcomes that is required
- ensuring that the planning and support provided for pupils with SEND lead to more rapid progress.

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

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 and 16 January 2019

Evidence

During the inspection, the inspectors observed learning, scrutinised pupils' work and reviewed documentation. Inspectors met with the interim headteacher and other school leaders. Inspectors also met with a national leader of education (NLE) and specialist leaders of education (SLEs) who are providing external support through a national teaching school. The lead inspector also met with the executive principal of the national teaching school.

Inspectors spoke formally with two groups of pupils and three groups of staff, including a group of middle leaders and a group of NQTs. Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils and staff around the school. Inspectors observed pupils before and after school and during social times.

The lead inspector met with a group of subject leaders and five members of the IEB, including the vice-chair. The lead inspector held meetings with a representative from the local authority and the director of education for the Diocese of Salford.

Inspectors discussed matters relating to safeguarding with school leaders. With the school's business manager, an inspector discussed and reviewed the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff, governors and volunteers to work with pupils.

Context

The local authority and the Diocese of Salford established an IEB in March 2018 to replace the governing body. The IEB acted to secure external support from a national teaching school. The national teaching school continues to provide support to the school. A new interim headteacher was appointed in September 2018. Ten teachers and two teaching assistants tendered their resignations at the end of the summer term 2018.

In September 2018, the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team were reassigned. A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) for pupils with SEND has been appointed. The SENCo is a senior assistant headteacher and is a member of the senior leadership team. A new director of science and director of religious education have been appointed at middle leadership level.

There have been several staff appointments since the previous inspection, including the appointment of seven NQTs across a range of subjects. A new lead practitioner and a teacher have been appointed in English. A new teacher of mathematics has been appointed. A specialist teacher of numeracy and literacy has also been appointed.

The school has been the subject of a directive academy order from the regional schools commissioner. So far, there has been little progress towards academy status. School leaders and the IEB are still unaware of any imminent plans to move this situation forward.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Following the previous inspection, there was limited internal capacity to move the school forward. This was because of inherent weaknesses in leadership at every level. Issues identified by inspectors could not be addressed initially. The governing body was not effective or efficient in its role. Consequently, an IEB was formed. As a result of disbanding the governing body and appointing the IEB, an external review of governance was not required.

Members of the IEB have a wealth of relevant expertise and knowledge. The swift action taken by the IEB meant that the school could begin a journey of much-needed improvement. The IEB was quick to commission support to remedy weaknesses at both senior and middle leadership levels. Members acted promptly to secure highly skilled support from experts from outside the school.

External experts have helped leaders to accept the problems which existed. These experts are making a positive difference to leadership at every level. They have also been active in improving the quality of teaching across the school. Arrangements are in place for support from a national teaching school to continue until the end of the academic year.

The IEB has also made key staffing appointments at both senior and middle leadership levels. A new interim headteacher was appointed in the summer term and took up post in September 2018. She has been instrumental in ensuring that staff work together to overcome the school's weaknesses. Staff are highly motivated and keen to improve the school. Following the improvements that have been made in the leadership of the school, staff can see a way forward.

The interim headteacher has implemented effective systems to monitor improvements. For example, there are systems to check on the quality of teaching. These are informing staff training and having a positive effect on the quality of teaching. Improving teaching and learning has been her primary focus.

The interim headteacher ensures that all judgements made about the quality of teaching are externally validated. This is done by staff from the local authority or by the national teaching school that is providing support. Plans to improve the school are accurately directed and the interim headteacher has left no stone unturned. She has prioritised leaders' actions to improve the school well. In addition, her plans focus on building leadership capacity and ensuring that the improvements made are sustainable.

Staff explained to inspectors that there has been a shift in the school's culture. Both pupils and staff welcome a higher level of challenge. The interim headteacher ensures that effective systems are in place to hold leaders to account. Middle leaders are held to account diligently for the quality of teaching in their subject areas. They meet regularly with senior leaders to assess and review the progress made in their subject areas.

An NLE completed a timely external review of leaders' use of pupil premium funding. Leaders were keen to learn from this and implement the recommendations made. Their actions have led to improvements in the quality of support that disadvantaged pupils receive. For example, the most able disadvantaged pupils benefit from additional support, which is having a positive effect on their progress. However, there have been intrinsic weaknesses in leadership and the quality of teaching for some time. As a result, disadvantaged pupils who left the school in 2018 underachieved considerably. However, leaders' assessment information and work in pupils' books show that the progress made by current disadvantaged pupils is improving.

There are now clear line management procedures to ensure that additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used more effectively. The leadership of this area has been strengthened. As a result, current disadvantaged pupils are making greater gains in their learning than they have in the past. Leaders have appointed two new staff to manage and improve disadvantaged pupils' attendance and behaviour. Reducing the rates of absence and exclusion for this group of pupils remains a priority in ensuring that their outcomes improve.

Leaders have taken rapid action to address several significant issues in the provision for pupils with SEND. The leadership of this aspect has been overhauled. There are now effective systems in place which mean that pupils with SEND are identified swiftly. Consequently, they receive more timely and appropriate support. Leaders review diligently whether this support is helping pupils to make progress. Leaders have a clear action plan in place to improve this aspect of the school's work further.

A newly appointed senior assistant headteacher has put systems in place to ensure that those pupils who are entitled to support through the Year 7 catch-up funding are identified accurately. This means that these pupils benefit from a range of support when they join the school. Leaders monitor the impact of this support to ensure that it is having a positive effect. For example, the reading ages of this group of pupils have increased significantly in the current academic year.

Leaders and the IEB commissioned support for the mathematics department. This external support has helped to improve the overall quality of teaching in this subject. As a result, there were some improvements in outcomes in mathematics for pupils who left the school in 2018. There is increased capacity for improvement within the mathematics department. Lead practitioners in mathematics are working

to raise teachers' expectations. This is increasing the level of challenge in pupils' mathematical learning.

Leaders have made considerable changes to a curriculum that was not fit for purpose. For example, leaders have made changes to benefit low-ability and disadvantaged pupils. Following a review of this area, pupils now study appropriate courses that better meet their needs. In addition, pupils receive more suitable advice and guidance in preparation for their option choices at key stage 4.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

The quality of teaching has improved across the school. This is because staff have benefited from training through support provided by external experts. Pupils explained to inspectors that they feel teaching is getting 'so much better'. Inspection evidence supports this view. For example, there is evidence of a higher level of challenge seen in the work of some pupils.

Teachers are more enthusiastic and confident in their teaching ability because of the training and support they have received. Teachers now make better use of questioning to develop pupils' learning. This is because teachers' expectations of what pupils can and should achieve are higher. Pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Teachers are challenging pupils, particularly in mathematics. Some pupils are able to learn from their mistakes. Nonetheless, occasions remain where pupils are unable to respond with the depth and detail required because the gaps in their learning still need to be made good.

Those teachers who are new to the profession are particularly positive about the support they receive. They appreciate the help they receive from external experts and more experienced colleagues in their subjects. NQTs feel that they receive appropriate support to manage pupils' behaviour effectively.

The support that teachers provide for pupils with SEND has improved considerably. Teachers are aware of pupils with SEND and use this information to plan learning that meets these pupils' needs. The newly appointed SENCo has ensured that there is a wide range of interventions to support this group of pupils. The progress of this group of pupils is monitored closely to ensure that teachers' support is effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Since the appointment of the interim headteacher, there has been a change in the behaviour culture across the school. There are systems in place to improve pupils' conduct and punctuality. Teachers have greater confidence in these systems to manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Consequently, these are having a positive effect.

Initially, as staff expectations of pupils' behaviour increased, a higher proportion of pupils were excluded from school. The number of exclusions is now starting to decrease. The same can be said for the number of behavioural incidents across the school.

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. There is still a very small proportion of pupils who disrupt learning. Teachers have higher expectations of pupils' behaviour during lessons and this is having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning.

There have been some improvements in pupils' rates of attendance. For example, rates of attendance for pupils with SEND have improved. However, pupils' attendance continues to be a concern, particularly in the case of disadvantaged pupils. Despite several strategies, leaders have been ineffective in reducing the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent from school. Leaders have taken further action to strengthen the staffing of this area. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this.

Outcomes for pupils

Pupils who left the school in 2018 underachieved considerably across several subjects. This was especially the case in English. There were some improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics. This is because teachers in this subject have been able to benefit from external support for a longer period.

Leaders ensure that the information teachers provide about pupils' progress is accurate. New systems ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are reliable. For example, external experts check that assessment information matches the work seen in pupils' books. Leaders' assessment information indicates that outcomes for current pupils are improving. This was also observed in pupils' books that were scrutinised by inspectors. A greater proportion of pupils are now making the progress of which they are capable. This is because more teachers are challenging pupils to improve their work and learn from their mistakes.

There are still shortfalls in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared with that of other pupils nationally. These are beginning to diminish, especially in key stage 3. Following improvements in the leadership of the school's SEND provision, pupils with SEND are making greater gains in their learning than they have done previously. This is because pupils with SEND are identified swiftly and more teachers are planning learning that meets their needs.

External support

The local authority and diocese have created an IEB which now provides a high level of challenge and support for leaders.

The support provided by the national teaching school has been essential in driving improvements. Considerable support has been provided through a NLE and several SLEs who work regularly with the school. This support has been effective in strengthening leadership at all levels.

The local authority, diocese and IEB are exploring a possible response to the directed academy order. However, progress in this area has been slow.