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Dear Mrs Bolton

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Mary's Catholic School, Penzance

Following my visit with Sally Olford, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 26–27 March 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in October 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 also 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 that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the interim chief executive officer of Plymouth CAST, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cornwall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Urgently improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and are used rigorously to check that pupils are on track to make at least good progress
 - leaders' plans for improvement are sharply focused on priorities and show the steps which must be taken to improve the school's effectiveness and the impact these actions will have on raising pupils' outcomes
 - middle leaders monitor and evaluate their areas of responsibility so that they can contribute strongly to improvement
 - the newly formed governing body has sufficient and accurate information to provide robust challenge for senior leaders
 - teaching is effective in meeting the individual needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise expectations of what all groups of pupils can achieve and improve pupils' progress, particularly for the most able pupils in reading and writing
 - accurately understand what pupils can and cannot do and use this knowledge to eradicate any gaps in learning
 - increase their subject knowledge in English so that they can plan the next steps in pupils' learning effectively, particularly for the most able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - in the early years use the assessment information to plan for the needs of all groups of children to be fully met.

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

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

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 26 March 2018 to 27 March 2018

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, two groups of pupils, eight parents, all members of the interim academy board and two representatives from Plymouth CAST. Inspectors observed learning in every class, looked at work in pupils' books with senior and middle leaders and spoke informally with a number of pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes to gain their views of the school. A range of documentary evidence was examined, including the school's plans for improvement, minutes of board meetings and leaders' monitoring of teaching. Inspectors spent the majority of the inspection evaluating the effectiveness of teaching over time and the capacity of middle leadership in securing sustainable improvements.

Context

Since the time of the last monitoring inspection in July 2017, only minor changes have occurred at the school. One member of staff has been on maternity leave. The assistant headteacher, who was previously non-class based, has been covering this teaching commitment. Pupil numbers continue to rise.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The purposeful start to tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last full inspection that were evident at my first monitoring visit continue apace. Your ongoing dedication to deliver the best possible education for the pupils in your care shines through. All those who spoke to inspectors commented on the support, attention to detail and thoughtfulness you display in your leadership. Improved communication with parents and carers is resulting in greater engagement from many in their child's learning. Parents are also contributing more to the wider life of the school. All those who met with me, sent in letters or completed questionnaires fully support your work and recognise your positive actions to improve all aspects of the school.

A new whole-school system for tracking pupils' progress is providing you with more detailed information from which to target key groups. Information is checked carefully through moderation exercises to assure the reliability and accuracy of judgements. The findings are used to plan 'accelerated learning programmes' for those pupils identified who need to catch up on their learning. Intervention is now being planned and delivered more promptly, so any early signs of a drop in performance can be addressed. Increasingly, information is being cross-referenced with other performance indicators, such as pupils' emotional needs or attendance, to plan for appropriate support. This is important as a number of new pupils at the school have complex or challenging personal or academic needs. This same level of

information sharing about pupils' performance in different subject areas has recently started but is not yet fully developed.

The quality of middle and subject leadership is improving rapidly. Leaders are drawing well on training provided. Opportunities to visit other schools has helped to clarify what effective teaching over time looks like and bring about the necessary changes to practice at St Mary's. Moderation activities are resulting in more accurate judgements being made of pupils' progress and attainment. Monitoring records of work scrutiny and lesson observations, which previously contained broad-brush evaluations, now contain precise and pertinent comments. The findings are being used to pinpoint specific interventions for key groups of pupils.

Your work to make St Mary's the very best place for a child to be educated is shown in the manner the curriculum offer has been expanded. The new school swimming pool is very popular with pupils and the wider community, and enables weekly sessions for each pupil. 'Wow' days, such as the 'no-pens Wednesday', enthuse pupils and parents in different ways of learning. Extension mathematics activities for the most able pupils based on Harry Potter foster community relations between schools in Penzance and stretch pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills well. Your collective actions are improving the quality of education at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Overall, the quality of teaching continues to improve across the school. Staff are using the improved information available to 'plug' gaps in knowledge, skill and understanding of older pupils who received weaker teaching in the past. Training is helping teachers identify misconceptions earlier. For example, in Year 5, planned activities in mathematics are adapted to secure pupils' deeper understanding of perimeter and area. More pupils therefore become confident in mathematical concepts and procedures taught before being moved on to new challenges.

Teachers are also using the improved information available to them together with their developing subject knowledge to match activities more precisely to the academic and personal needs of different groups. Support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is now characterised by high expectations. Clear modelling of expectations and strategies by adults is helping lower-attaining pupils make stronger progress from their starting points.

The teaching of mathematics is more effective in developing pupils' fluency, reasoning and problem-solving skills. 'Cold' and 'hot' tasks now provide clear checks on pupils' improvement on concepts between the start and the end of units of work. A consistent approach following an agreed 'learning pathway' is evident across all the classes. The '99 club', to complete fast mental arithmetic challenges in a limited time, is improving pupils' understanding of the relationships between numbers well. The fortnightly 'masters' mathematics award is raising pupils' enthusiasm for the

subject. The occasions where activities are not sufficiently challenging and low-level disruption occurs are now increasingly infrequent.

Pupils' early reading and knowledge of the alphabet code is improving because the teaching of phonics is technically accurate and precise. Adults use the correct terminology to help pupils identify graphemes and phonemes in order to blend and segment the sounds letters make. Children in Reception develop their understanding of the link between reading and writing when being 'English Explorers', writing their daily sentences. The strong focus on communication is also helping to improve children's mathematical language and understanding, for example when comparing the size of different objects or numbers.

Mixed approaches to the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPAG) across the school are leading to variable outcomes. The clear framework evident in how the purpose and structure of each genre should be taught is not established for the technical aspects of composition. Some teaching of SPAG occurs through the use of plenaries or using pupils' work. Other teaching is done in discrete daily sessions; in other instances, once a week. The strong focus on spelling, evident in pupils' SPAG books, has been at the expense of improvements in punctuation and grammar. Consequently, a disjoint occurs between some technical aspects of SPAG and the genre pupils' are writing. Pupils therefore become confused and the quality of their writing suffers. You are aware that pupils' spelling, handwriting and grammar remain a focus for further improvement.

The school has developed good practice from which to draw upon based on an agreed approach to teaching and learning. Pupils in Year 2 are enthused through activities that stimulate their thirst for enquiry when studying pirates. Female pirates, such as Lady Mary Killigrew, provide a local context for historical study and challenge stereotypes well. Pupils' geographic knowledge is enhanced when studying pirate coves and caves. Information and communication technology is used well to research famous pirates and produce 'pirate codes' and wanted posters. Where good subject knowledge is combined with methodical curriculum design to link subjects together and build on pupils' prior knowledge, progress is rapid. In instances where the school's approach is not yet fully developed, activities fail to build on prior learning or are one-off experiences for pupils. In such circumstances, pupils' progress is not as strong across a range of subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils and parents are universally positive about their school and the improvements being made. Pupils across the school show positive attitudes to school life and learning. Those who spoke with an inspector were clear that 'month on month Mrs Bolton is improving our school'. They feel confident to discuss their work with their peers and other adults and demonstrate increasingly positive attitudes. For example, pupils enthusiastically tell how to adapt characters when creating their own version of stories. They are confident when reading aloud to their peers.

Furthermore, they are proud of the work they produce and demonstrate a keenness to share their experiences, indicating how much they enjoy coming to school.

Last year, pupils' persistent absence from school and overall attendance were not good enough. Your careful work with parents and the local community is ensuring that more pupils are attending punctually and more regularly. Close liaison with your education welfare officer is targeting key pupils and is changing the culture for many families about the importance of attending regularly at school. Consequently, this year, improvements are evident for many pupils.

You are aware that some of your pupils lack the emotional resilience and 'grit' to stick at unfamiliar or challenging tasks. When faced with such experiences, many default to an adult too readily or are unwilling to try things out for themselves. Others claim they are stuck or unable to do the work. You are working hard to change this culture and ensure that pupils have more strategies to face challenges with greater confidence and certainty, but there remains some way to go to achieve this aim.

Outcomes for pupils

Published results in 2017 illustrate pupils' improved performance from their previous levels, which were below the national averages. The improvements demonstrate the impact of your collective actions and represent a step-change in the culture of rising expectations at the school.

In Reception, the proportion of pupils reaching the early learning goals for mathematics, reading and writing was above the national average. Children currently in Reception are making positive strides forward in their early development. Activities are carefully woven and link to different areas of learning, so children make connections between their different experiences. Children develop the concept of scale well when measuring which was the biggest dinosaur as part of their topic. They were shocked to find it was 40 metres, almost the length of the school field!

In 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standards in the Year 1 and Year 2 phonics screening checks was above the national average. Training, more accurate monitoring and the targeting of key pupils are ensuring that current pupils are on track to achieve at least as well this year. Just occasionally, pupils receiving additional phonics support are not reminded on correct letter formation or pencil grip when writing. This limits their ability to record more accurately the graphemes and phonemes taught.

Effective teaching in Year 2 is helping more pupils to reach the standards expected for their age by the end of key stage 1. In 2017 a greater proportion than found nationally reached the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents a marked improvement in progress from previous years and is securing

the foundations for longer-term improvements. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers also reduced dramatically.

Pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 display gaps in their learning and knowledge from historical weaknesses in teaching. All staff are working tirelessly to remedy these weaknesses and ensure that more pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education. Current work in books and school progress information show that most pupils are making strong progress from their starting points, including the disadvantaged and those who have SEN and disabilities.

The sharp focus over the last four terms on developing pupils' English and mathematics skills is proving effective. However, for some pupils, their knowledge and understanding of foundation subjects remains fragile. Pupils are therefore unable to talk confidently about key people from Britain's past. Some pupils are unclear what they are learning about in geography and are therefore confused over human or physical processes. You are excited about the prospect of developing the foundation curriculum and ensuring that more pupils make good progress across a range of subjects.

External support

Leaders are not drawing on external support from beyond the trust. Internal support, training and guidance from Plymouth CAST is contributing to the overall leadership of the schools more strongly than in the past. Members of the interim academy board hold the necessary skills and expertise to drive forward the improvements necessary. Sharp and pertinent evaluations are used to inform precise improvement plans and target key groups of pupils. Board members have secured additional governors who are being trained to assure the long-term success of the school.

The new system to track the progress pupils are making is providing the trust with more reliable and accurate information. Leaders are therefore being held more firmly to account for the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. Fortnightly visits from the education and standards manager ensure that the trust is fully informed about the improvements being secured and what work still needs to be done.