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Mrs Susan Johnson
St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy
Benton Road
Ilford
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Dear Mrs Johnson

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Aidan's Catholic Primary Academy

Following my visit with James Robinson, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 22–23 May 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 academy's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the academy became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2017. 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 strongly recommend that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Thwaites

Her Majesty's Inspector

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 22 May 2018 to 23 May 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the inclusion leader, the newly appointed head of early years, a group of middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with members of staff who are responsible for safeguarding and who oversee the checks relating to staff recruitment and the records relating to attendance. The school's admissions register was also reviewed. Telephone conversations took place with the chair of the interim executive board and the deputy director of education for the diocese. A meeting was held with the head of school improvement for the local authority. The school's evaluation and school improvement documents were scrutinised, together with documents relating to safeguarding and meetings of the interim executive board.

Inspectors visited lessons with school leaders, sampling a range of pupils' books. Inspectors reviewed the school's information about the progress that pupils are making, talked to a group of pupils and heard pupils read. Inspectors spoke to parents to gather their views of the school. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to make a valid analysis.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit, three agency staff have been employed until the end of the summer term. Two of the three staff have replaced the class teachers who left in the spring and summer terms, and one has taken on the role of teaching assistant. In addition, you have been successful in appointing an experienced early years leader for two days each week to oversee the leadership of early years. The senior leadership team has been strengthened with the permanent appointment of the assistant headteacher. One member of the interim executive board has resigned from their post. Leaders and members of the interim executive board continue to work with the diocese and with the local authority to improve the school.

Discussions between the Diocese of Brentwood and the interim executive board around the future of the school have progressed. Formal consultation has begun with parents, staff and union representatives around the formation of a multi-academy trust. Initially, the proposal is that St Aidan's would partner with a local secondary school and another primary school within the diocese, both judged as 'good' at their most recent Ofsted inspections.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

With targeted support from external partners, senior leaders have continued to

secure improvements within the areas identified at the last full inspection, which took place in February 2017.

Safeguarding continues to remain a high priority. The appropriate checks have been undertaken for all new appointments, and the single central record is complete. Leaders have ensured that admissions registers are maintained in line with statutory guidance, and that timely referrals are made to the local authority for those pupils at risk of being deemed 'missing in education'. Leaders respond swiftly to instances of concern. They review safeguarding practice and undertake assessments of risks when required.

However, despite the improvements made since the last monitoring visit, leaders have been slow in implementing an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding. Consequently, it is too soon to report on the impact of key recommendations. The school does not have accurate data regarding previous pupil premium allocation or spending. Analysis has not been carried out for previous years, apart from the statutory report, which is now published on the school's website. The school's most recent assessment information demonstrates that there are signs of increased progress among this group of pupils. However, despite some successes, attainment remains low in certain year groups. The review, undertaken on 8 May, identifies the need for leaders to ensure a more strategic approach when planning for, and recording the impact of, pupil premium spending.

Since the last visit, the work with middle leaders has begun to have an impact on pupils' outcomes, and pupils' progress in most classes has been becoming stronger. Dedicated leadership time for middle leaders to work alongside staff, consultants and the senior leadership team is enabling this group to contribute to further school improvement. Mathematics and literacy leaders, in particular, have been instrumental in supporting staff to raise their expectations of what pupils can do. You have recognised talent in some existing leaders. You subsequently arranged support from external consultants and brought this talent to the fore. For example, your inclusion leader has rapidly developed the skills necessary to evaluate the impact of additional funding for improving outcomes for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Middle leaders told inspectors that they feel more confident about analysing data and supporting teachers to improve, as a direct result of the training and support they have received. This group of leaders now monitors the quality of teaching more systematically.

Middle leaders are increasingly accurate in their evaluation of strengths and areas for future development in their subject areas. Their subject plans place a stronger focus on how leaders and teachers can develop a better understanding of what effective teaching and learning look like in their areas of expertise.

At previous visits, obtaining early years expertise was identified as a priority. This is because leaders recognised that judgements based on children's development were far too broad and lacked precision. However, a substantive early years leader has

recently been appointed. In the absence of a senior leader with early years expertise, many of the actions identified in the school's post-Ofsted action plan for this phase have not been addressed. Leaders are acutely aware of the need to implement these actions swiftly.

Leaders' self-evaluation of the school is overly positive. This evaluation and leaders' termly reports to the interim executive board lack sufficient, pertinent detail to enable the board to hold leaders fully to account. For example, a recent report focused on evaluating the progress of pupils in Years 1 to 6, but did not provide early years assessments or any indication of the proportions of pupils working at age-related expectations. Consequently, members of the board were unable to identify any areas of weakness through the school. Members of the board have not held leaders to account for the timeliness of actions relating to the implementation of a pupil premium review or actions identified for improvement in the early years.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Despite signs of improvement, there is still a degree of variability in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, raising the quality of teaching remains a priority for the school.

The work of middle leaders is starting to have an impact. Although some variability still exists between classes and the proportions of pupils working at age-related expectations remain low in some cases, expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen among staff. This is the result of training and support provided by middle and senior leaders, and opportunities for teachers to check the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work with colleagues in and beyond the school. Professional development opportunities are successfully supporting adults to improve their subject knowledge, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics.

Adults are increasingly adept at checking pupils' understanding. Pupils commented that adults' explanations in lessons are improving and helping them to understand what is expected of them. Pupils were less positive about the effectiveness of peer assessment in moving their learning forward. Pupils say they find feedback most helpful when they are given time to reflect and respond accordingly. They told inspectors that they would value more opportunities to share their views on how they learn best.

Teachers apply the training they have received in writing, particularly well. They provide pupils with writing opportunities that engage their interests and prompt their curiosity. For example, at the end of key stage 2, teachers successfully use high-quality literature and interesting themes to excite and engage pupils to write for a range of purposes and audiences. Recent work shows that pupils are able to use accurate spelling and grammar in extended pieces of writing.

Teachers are applying their recent training in teaching mathematics to implement

planned opportunities for mathematical reasoning and problem solving. New resources are supporting teachers to plan challenging learning opportunities. However, it is too soon to gauge the impact of this recent initiative.

Provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has improved and their books indicate that these pupils are making strong progress from their starting points. Well-drafted personal education plans for children who are looked after take into account the views of both the child and carer effectively. Teachers use these to plan learning and support in class, enabling steady progress.

Following an audit of reading resources, leaders have extended the range of texts and reorganised the way in which reading comprehension is taught. This has helped pupils to delve more deeply into characters, plots and fiction texts, and to write with a greater understanding of audience and purpose. However, the range of high-quality reading material is still limited. At the time of the visit, pupils were overly reliant on books brought in from home to enhance their reading experiences. Pupils are unaware of the books available in school and the library is considered as a place where you go for additional support lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Leaders' work to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance has been sustained since the previous visit. Pupils are well-behaved and keen learners. They are a delight to talk to and are strong ambassadors for the school.

Since the last inspection in February 2017, attendance has improved and is in line with the national average. Effective systems are in place for monitoring and supporting the attendance of key groups and vulnerable pupils. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils remains high. The attendance of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is in line with the average for all pupils nationally.

Leaders have focused sharply on celebrating and recognising improvements in attendance through the publication of weekly attendance figures in the school's newsletters, and regular meetings with families who need support. The school is now well placed to extend its success in this area to the monitoring of pupil punctuality.

Outcomes for pupils

Outcomes are improving across the school. Ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching ensure that pupils' progress is deepening and they are beginning to catch up with their peers, nationally. Consequently, proportions of pupils working at or above age-related expectations are beginning to rise. Pupils' books show that their progress is improving in reading, mathematics and, particularly, writing. However, there is still variability in the quality of teaching across the school. Overall, therefore, outcomes are not yet good across the school.

Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities now make rapid progress. This is a result of helpful partnerships with external agencies, clear identification of needs and strong bespoke support. Disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to their classmates in most year groups.

In the early years, limited leadership capacity and inaccuracies in assessment information over time have made it difficult for leaders to pinpoint and track children's progress across the curriculum. School data indicates that the proportion of children on track to attain a good level of development by the end of Reception is low. Work in children's learning journals, however, indicates an improving picture.

External support

School leaders in this stand-alone academy have been proactive in seeking support from the diocese and local authority. The local authority's explicit belief that the well-being of every child in Redbridge is of importance to it, has benefited the school and its pupils greatly. School leaders have welcomed support from local authority advisers. Leaders are positive about, and value, the recent safeguarding and learning audits provided by the head of the local authority school improvement service. The diocese has recently secured funding to support the school to address the outstanding actions in its post-Ofsted action plan, regarding provision in the early years.