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9 November 2017

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 Jonathan Newby, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 18–19 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 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 February 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 trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

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 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

Annex

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

- Ensure that as a matter of urgency governors and leaders make pupils' safety a top priority by:
 - making sure that all staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities to safeguard pupils
 - taking immediate action to ensure that all the appropriate checks are completed for all staff and governors in the school
 - making sure that all the documents in the safer recruitment files meet statutory requirements
 - putting into place personal education plans for children who are looked after
 - ensuring that governors receive up-to-date training in preventing radicalisation and extremism.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders accurately assess the school's performance and prioritise actions to secure rapid improvement
 - making sure that the school's plans for improvement focus tightly on the progress of all groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils
 - securing accuracy in the assessments of pupils' learning to inform teaching in all year groups
 - making sure that teaching is consistently good or better across all year groups and in all subjects, including the early years
 - ensuring that leaders work effectively with external agencies, where appropriate, to support the most vulnerable pupils in the school.
- Ensure that governors provide effective challenge and support to leaders by holding them to account for their statutory responsibilities related to safeguarding, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes, including those of disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve attendance rates for all pupils, particularly those eligible for free school meals, by analysing information regularly and putting into place effective actions to enable them to attend more regularly.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan activities that promote better progress, and raise their expectations of what pupils can do and achieve
 - teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning skills through problem solving

- reading is taught consistently across key stage 2 to develop pupils’ inference and deduction skills.
- Immediately improve the effectiveness of the early years provision by ensuring that:
 - children have a safe learning environment to learn and play and are well supervised when they move from one learning activity to another
 - recruitment checks confirm that all adults are suitable to work with children
 - adults effectively observe, plan and assess children’s learning and development to ensure that they make rapid progress.

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

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

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 18 October 2017 to 19 October 2017

Evidence

This monitoring inspection focused on the effectiveness of safeguarding. It also considered aspects of leadership and management, and the effectiveness of early years provision in providing a safe environment in which children can learn. Inspectors did not focus in detail on the other areas for improvement, although they were referred to during discussions with leaders and trustees.

Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior leaders, the chair and two members of the interim executive board, the inclusion leader and a group of staff. They also met with members of staff responsible for overseeing the checks relating to staff recruitment and records of pupils' attendance, including a meeting with the local authority welfare officer. A telephone conversation with the director of education for the diocese, and a separate meeting with the head of school improvement from the local authority, took place. A meeting was held with an early years leader from another local school who, for one day a week, is providing leadership support in the early years. An inspector scrutinised the school's single central record of statutory checks made on staff and met with the designated safeguarding lead. Records relating to safeguarding and a range of the school's documentation were reviewed, including minutes of meetings of the interim executive board and the school's action and improvement plans. Inspectors also visited lessons with school leaders, sampled a range of books and spoke informally with pupils. Inspectors talked to parents about their views of the school.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been many staff changes at the school, including significant leadership changes. The school has benefited from the swift action taken by the diocese and local authority. Together they ensured that, following the absence of key staff, an interim headteacher was appointed for the summer term 2017 and an interim executive board established as the governing body stepped down.

Several staff have left the school. The school has struggled to recruit staff for September and has a mix of substantive and supply staff. Some teachers currently employed are on short-term contracts, including in key leadership posts. The interim executive board are committed to supporting and continuing to move the school forward. They have prioritised securing an experienced, interim executive headteacher from a local school to lead the school for the current academic year, while they explore further options to secure leadership succession and capacity for the school. Consequently, since the start of this term, the school is benefiting from your leadership. You are well supported by two new senior leaders: a head of school and a deputy headteacher, who joined the school in September.

The diocese and the interim executive board are discussing plans for the school to become part of a multi-academy trust. A date of January 2018 has been proposed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders and the interim executive board have worked together to rectify the deficiencies found in safeguarding during the previous inspection. All staff are now clear that it is everyone's responsibility to keep pupils safe. Consequently, a culture of vigilance and care prevails. School leaders and staff, with strong support from the local authority and members of the interim executive board, have led this work well.

When talking to inspectors, all staff spoke accurately and with understanding about key safeguarding issues that can affect children, such as female genital mutilation, extremism and radicalisation, and the risk of children going missing in education. Pupils' absences are followed up in a timely manner. Staff are clear about the most recent statutory safeguarding guidance and the school's own policies around keeping children safe. As part of their induction, staff have received thorough and appropriate training. In addition to this, all staff have had refresher safeguarding training at the start of this term.

The single central record is complete. Appointment checks have been undertaken thoroughly for all staff, including those working in the early years provision. Well-organised staff files now contain up-to-date and detailed information which meets statutory requirements. At the time of the last inspection, it was deemed that the youngest children were at risk in terms of health and safety. These risks have since been addressed. Transitions between learning activities are well supervised. The Nursery and Reception classes are now positioned together within their own fenced area.

The interim executive board comprises highly skilled individuals who bring a wealth of expertise in many areas, including safeguarding, education, finance, health and safety. Leaders and members of the interim executive board have fully embraced the importance of changing the culture of expectations which existed at the time of the previous inspection. They have worked hard to improve lines of communication between the school and parents, which is leading to parents' increasing confidence in the leadership of the school.

Staff are positive about the leadership of the school; they recognise that change is required, and have valued the changes that have taken place. Staff value the clear guidance given on planning, reading and the teaching of phonics. Staff understand the school's overarching priorities. However, they are unsure of which of the many priorities, from the previous inspection, are the foci for the coming term.

The new senior leadership team has a clear, strategic calendar to oversee and track important events. Leaders' own self-evaluation of the school is mostly accurate and the school's action planning is fit for purpose. However, it would benefit from more

alignment with the trust's statement of action, a clearer separation of the roles and activities for monitoring and evaluation, and the inclusion of targets for pupils' attainment and progress.

New staff induction guidelines and a new behaviour policy for pupils are beginning to make a difference to teaching and assessment by ensuring clarity and consistency in the school's expectations. Teachers and pupils speak positively about the provision. You are nurturing those members of staff who have risen to the challenges faced by the school and those who are showing promise and are developing their skills. As a result, stronger foundations are being laid to support planned improvements. However, it is too soon to measure the impact of these newly planned actions.

The school now has systems in place to ensure that pupils who are looked after by the local authority are known to them and have personal education plans in place. Recently implemented attendance systems are beginning to make a difference. Pupils' records show evidence of recent successes linked to the introduction of penalty notices for unauthorised absences. However, the school does not track the attendance of key groups or vulnerable pupils. Consequently, leaders remain unclear if attendance strategies are making a difference to the higher levels of absence seen for these groups.

Significant improvements to safeguarding and the strengthening of leadership through the establishment of the interim executive board are important steps towards the removal of special measures. Nonetheless, the transient nature of the newly formed senior leadership team means that there is still some uncertainty regarding the future leadership direction at the school. Two of the three leadership posts that started in September are termly contracts which expire at the end of this term. One is a part-time interim headship agreement, which ends at the end of the academic year. Some significant weaknesses remain in the school's work around previously identified areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. Senior leaders acknowledge the need to strengthen leadership across the school so that initial systems, new policies and practices can be supported and monitored to check their impact on securing strong progress for all pupils.

An external review of governance has not taken place, as the governing body was swiftly disbanded and a specially recruited, highly experienced interim executive board put in place by the diocese.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium has not yet taken place. The interim executive board rightly prioritised pupils' safety, addressing both site security and safeguarding issues in the first instance. They plan on commissioning an external review of the school's use of the pupil premium imminently.

External support

The support and challenge provided by the diocese and local authority have been highly effective. The interim executive board, the associate board members and the local authority's head of school improvement have an accurate view of the school. Together, they have used their skills and expertise well, successfully putting in place a range of support to address the safeguarding concerns identified at the last inspection. During the summer term 2017, the local authority head of school improvement worked closely with the school. During this time the school benefited from a range of services from the local authority. These have included specialist support in safer-recruitment practice, human resource management, mathematics, literacy and special educational needs.