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Mr Stephen Jordan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jordan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Paul's CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 June 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- refine some of the school improvement and action plans, to include clear milestones, based on evidence, in each of the priority areas, so that leaders, governors and external agencies such as the local authority can check the school's progress more efficiently
- identify where teachers are using the new school strategies most effectively and share this practice to improve all teaching
- increase the opportunities to verify teacher assessments of pupil progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders of mathematics, English, computing, history and geography. Meetings were also held with groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated along with individual subject action plans for early years, mathematics, computing and geography. Samples of pupils' writing and mathematics work in books, along with science and other subject areas in the topic books, were scrutinised. The school's own evaluations of the quality of teaching, the single central record of the checks undertaken to ensure the safer recruitment of staff and safeguarding procedures were also examined.

Context

The current deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs leader, will be leaving at the end of the summer term and a new appointment has been recruited to this post. A current member of staff will be undertaking the special educational needs leader role. In addition to this, new members of staff are taking up post in September to replace staff who are leaving.

Building work will take place during the summer break, adding a larger space for creative subjects such as music and including a dedicated area for community use.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have acted with varying degrees of pace to address the areas identified for improvement. This has resulted in some areas improving quicker than others. For example, your work in the early years and your monitoring work of tracking disadvantaged pupils' progress have moved along at a rapid pace. However, the school improvement plan has been revised on numerous occasions. While actions are increasingly becoming more specific, the lack of milestones for some priority areas sometimes makes it difficult for governors to be able to check the extent to which all actions are having a positive impact on pupils' learning.

You have refined and updated your assessment systems to ensure that there is a greater level of accuracy and consistency among staff. This has allowed staff to concentrate on developing the quality of their assessment so that this better informs their planning and teaching. The school's marking and feedback policy has led to a higher level of consistency and efficiency of feedback to pupils. While there have been internal checks on the assessment information, you rightly acknowledge that more work could be undertaken to further secure the accuracy of assessment and effectiveness of feedback.

All leaders' monitoring of pupils' progress and teaching and learning is routinely carried out and includes regular scrutiny of pupils' work in books. Pupil progress meetings are also now held every half term. This is ensuring that leaders and teachers quickly identify which pupils are at risk of falling behind and plan appropriate support to meet their needs. As a result of this, all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, those of lower ability and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are receiving better provision and the rates of progress they make are improving.

The provision for disadvantaged pupils has improved since the previous inspection. The deputy headteacher closely monitors disadvantaged pupils' progress very effectively. The school's progress information, and inspection evidence, verifies that disadvantaged pupils are making better progress because leaders have carefully planned programmes of support that address their individual needs. They are now a main focus at all the pupil progress meetings, which ensures that their support is reviewed regularly and consequently their rates of progress increase.

The greatest level of progress made in the school is within the early years. This is successful because the diligent leader in early years is working with the improvement adviser, heeding advice and relentlessly working on each area for improvement. There is clear evidence that the information collected about the children is being used well to plan activities and is focusing on challenging the most able children. Consequently, children are starting to make better progress from their starting points.

Subject leaders have taken the areas of priority identified in the previous inspection very seriously. They have brought consistency in their approach to monitoring and analysing school information, and act swiftly to deal with emerging issues. Curriculum planning to allow pupils to progress over time and be ready for their next stages is now securely in place.

The chair of the governing body is very effective in challenging and supporting leaders to keep doing better. He has an insightful understanding of what the school needs to do to improve. The chair is ably supported by a committed governing body that quickly acted upon the areas identified in the previous inspection. As a result, marked improvements have taken place. For example, one success is the strength of the teaching, learning and pupil welfare committee that focuses on the school's work linked to pupil outcomes. Governors are much clearer on assessment information. This has sharpened the work of the governing body and increased their effectiveness to challenge leaders over the achievement of pupils in their care.

Safeguarding procedures continue to be effective. During the monitoring visit your systems were checked and these are securely in place. The local authority has also conducted a full safeguarding audit to support the school in securing even better processes. This ensures that pupils are kept safe.

External support

Following the inspection in December 2015, leaders have worked very effectively with the primary adviser from the local authority. They use her regular and focused visits to the school to keep improving against the priorities identified in their action plan. School leaders appreciate the high quality of the support that the local authority has provided. This also includes valuable additional support for the early years, subject leaders and governors.

Leaders have actively sought external advice to help them to act on the areas identified in the previous inspection. They have successfully established network arrangements with local schools. This has allowed opportunities for staff to share best practice with teachers in other schools. Consequently, this is helping to improve the quality of teaching overall at St Paul's.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Ely, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tracy Fielding

Her Majesty's Inspector