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Miss Caroline Powell
Rusthall St Paul's CofE VA Primary School
High Street
Tunbridge Wells
TN4 8RZ

Dear Miss Powell

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

Following my visit to your school on 9 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 March 2014. 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 recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- Sharpen the school's action plan by including targets for the proportion of pupils making better than expected progress by the end of Year 6 and expectations for progress in Key Stage One
- Ensure governor monitoring reports show clear next steps so that recommendations are followed through effectively.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the acting deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Brief visits were made to all classes. The school's improvement plan

and the governors' action plan were evaluated. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were reviewed.

Context

Since the school was inspected in March 2014 the Chair of Governors has resigned. The role is currently being undertaken by the Vice Chair of Governors. A class teacher in Year 4 left the school in April 2014 and has been replaced with an experienced teacher.

Main findings

Following the school's inspection in March you acted swiftly and decisively to implement the required changes. You are clearly ambitious for the school and its pupils and your work is driving the school forward in the right direction on its journey to be judged 'good'. You have good support from your well-focused leadership team, who appreciate your clear direction and encouragement.

Your action plan concentrates on all the right areas. It includes clear targets for staff to aim for. However these do not include the higher levels of challenge which you expect for pupils by the end of Year 6, or the progress expected for pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. You have planned changes in a logical sequence and made sure there is time allocated to check carefully how well these are working. You have indicated exactly who will carry out each action so there is no doubt who is responsible, which ensures there is clear accountability for each area.

The new tracker grids in the front of each pupil's English and mathematics books show precisely what each pupil has achieved and what needs to be worked on. Subject leaders for mathematics and English provide helpful support for teachers' planning as needed. As a result teachers ensure each pupil tackles work at the right level to help them improve.

You have developed a new marking policy which is used consistently in all classes so that pupils know exactly what to expect as they move through the school. There is still work to be done to ensure pupils respond fully to their teacher's comments but you have made a good start with this work.

Presentation of work was not an area specifically identified during the inspection, but you have rightly decided to focus on this to raise standards. Pupils know how to set their work out clearly with the date and title. Your next step is to provide opportunities for pupils to present their work in more creative and purposeful ways so they are inspired to do their best. An example of this was seen in the booklets Year 3 pupils created to showcase their work on spiders. This links well with your work on the new curriculum for September, which will offer 'stunning starts' and 'fantastic finishes' to really motivate the pupils.

Staff in the Reception class provide children with a range of activities to help develop their reading and writing. The recently revamped book corner offers a welcoming place to enjoy reading and children happily use the clipboards provided to practise their writing and record their ideas. Adults have had useful training on questioning which is helping them to develop children's communication skills.

You are working hard to strengthen pupils' pride in their school. Your decision to launch a new, smarter uniform has been well received by parents and pupils. You are rightly looking at the school's values and vision with staff, pupils, parents and governors. In this way you aim to renew the sense of what it means to be a part of Rusthall St Paul's CE Primary School, and to raise everyone's expectations about achievement and behaviour.

The work to increase attendance is starting to pay off. The school has worked successfully with several families so their children come to school more regularly. Pupils respond positively to Attendance Ted's presence in assembly, and aim to be awarded one of the new attendance certificates. As a result of this work attendance rates are improving.

The recent review of governance was helpful to focus governors on precisely what they need to do to make improvements. The acting chair of governors responded quickly by writing an action plan including all the recommendations from the review. Some of the most important points, such as reorganising the committee structure and carrying out a skills audit, have already been acted upon. You ensure governors receive the right information to help them challenge the school's work, including pupil progress data. The school's action plan is a helpful tool: governors check carefully how well actions are progressing and report their findings back to the strategy group. Their reports do not however always include clear 'next steps' to ensure any recommendations are followed through. A review of the school's use of the Pupil Premium will shortly take place.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided appropriate support to help the school tackle the areas for improvement. Work in the Reception class has been particularly effective in raising expectations for these learners. The Diocese carried out the useful review of governance which is helping governors improve their work. Senior leaders are rightly seeking to use other schools to gain ideas. For example, teachers have looked at pupils' work from another school to see what is possible at Rusthall St Paul's, and visits are planned to look at how other schools use role play areas. Such actions are invaluable to enable teachers to benefit from good practice elsewhere.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard

Her Majesty's Inspector