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Nicholas Bickley
Headteacher
St Paul's CofE (C) Primary School
Garden Street
Stafford
ST17 4BT

Dear Mr Bickley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Paul's CofE (C) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 2014, 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 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:

- implement the recommendations of the recent review of governance, ensuring that each member of the governing body understands their responsibility to challenge school leaders
- increase the frequency of checks on the quality of teaching in lessons by yourself, mathematics and literacy leaders, to support the regular analysis of data, and scrutiny of pupils' work by school leaders
- refine systems for analysing and reporting on attainment and progress in all year groups
- support more-able pupils to reach the higher levels in assessments right through the school, not just in Year 6.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, two members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, and the leader for mathematics. The improvement plan was evaluated. A series of visits was made to classrooms with you, observing teaching, looking at books and talking with pupils. Documentary evidence of learning in Class 1 was considered. Two pupils in Year 6 discussed their work in detail and shared their views about changes in the school.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the Chair of the Governing Body has taken a break from the role, and the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body is currently in the role of chair. Class 1 was on a trip during the day of the inspection visit. The class teacher arranged for evidence of Class 1's work to be available.

Main findings

The 'Requires Improvement Action Plan', written in April 2014, identifies appropriate actions, allocates responsibilities and specifies realistic time-scales. You update the plan regularly and report to the governing body, in detail, on progress.

The Acting Chair of the Governing Body has led a small core group of governors very effectively, addressing the areas for improvement with vigour, and quickly establishing improved ways of working. Now that the review of governance is complete, the governing body is preparing to become more tightly focused on challenging leaders to improve standards throughout the school.

After the previous inspection, you quickly introduced new systems for managing behaviour, including 'Golden Rules', sanctions and rewards. Pupils understand these and are motivated to behave well. There has been a dramatic reduction in negative behaviour in all classes from a few incidents to hardly any. This picture was supported by observations of behaviour in classes during the visit.

The purchase of cloakroom pegs, and staff expectations of orderly behaviour, has led to pupils taking more responsibility for their belongings. As a result, the corridors are neat and tidy, and pupils move sensibly from one activity to another.

The marking of pupils' work has improved. Teachers now allow pupils 'Fix-It Time' to respond to teachers' comments in their books. As a result, pupils correct errors regularly and say that they value the dialogue about their learning.

A sticker system is now used more effectively to help older pupils to remember their literacy targets when they are working in other subjects. This is resulting in improved writing standards in topic books in Key Stage 2.

By moving the access to the main entrance to the building, you have ensured that the play area used by Class 1 is now safer, self-contained, and less visible from the road. This enables staff to plan and set out equipment more easily. Consequently, all areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are now available outside for children to explore.

Mathematics and literacy leaders have written and implemented well-focused numeracy and literacy action plans. The numeracy plan focuses appropriately on improving pupils' progress, on developing the new national curriculum, and on checking assessments across the school.

You provided the results of very recent assessments of pupils' attainment, but you had not yet analysed the results sufficiently to notice that, in 2014, compared with 2013, fewer pupils reached the higher levels in the Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1. Numeracy and literacy actions plans should be adapted to address this.

You, and the mathematics and literacy leaders, have not observed pupils in lessons regularly enough to spot under-achievement early on. Teachers have implemented new systems, such as the 'success ladder', to try to encourage all pupils to aim high but teachers are still not challenging more-able pupils as much as they could. You agree that pupils do not always know exactly what they need to do if they are to achieve the next level, although teachers do provide parents with precise pupil targets six times a year.

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 knows the school well. It is providing effective support for the school to improve the quality of governance, to address teaching in the Foundation Stage and to check behaviour and well-being. The local authority has commissioned the services of a Local Leader in Education to support you. This support will begin as soon as possible. There have been some delays in responding to the school's requests for support. The governing body and school leaders value the support given.

I am copying this letter to the Acting Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire County Council.

Yours sincerely

Chris Malone

Her Majesty's Inspector