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27 February 2015

Catherine Clarke  
Headteacher  
St Paul's CofE (C) First School  
School Lane  
Coven  
Wolverhampton  
WV9 5AD

Dear Mrs Clarke

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

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2015, 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- work closely with the local authority to improve the leadership of the school
- make sure that teaching across all aspects of reading enables pupils to make rapid gains in their learning
- make sure that the checks carried out to assess teachers' skills are carried out more often and that subsequent feedback to teachers is precise.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you as headteacher and with four members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We made brief visits to classrooms and looked at a sample of pupils' books. We considered a number of documents including plans for improvement, information about pupils' achievement and records of the checks that leaders make on the work of teachers. I also met with a representative of the local authority.

## **Context**

Since the Section 5 inspection, three teachers have left the school. Three new teachers have been appointed. A new deputy headteacher will start at the school after Easter. The English subject leader has been in post for less than a term.

## **Main findings**

You and the governors understand that although some improvements have been made, these have not been fast enough. The school is not improving more rapidly because you and other leaders do not make sure that the required changes are being implemented correctly. Some leaders are new to their role or are looking after a subject on a temporary basis. Most have not received sufficient support or training to carry out their roles effectively.

The checks you make on the work of teachers are not completed often enough to make sure that teachers are making the necessary improvements to their practice. Consequently, ineffective teaching is not been tackled quickly enough and pupils' progress has begun to falter. Your information about pupils' progress shows that in three year groups around half of the pupils are not making expected progress - this is unacceptable.

The conclusions you draw from your analysis of assessment information are sometimes overly positive and do not give governors an accurate picture of where improvement is urgently needed. This is most evident when reporting to governors that all pupils entered Year 1 with a good level of development and yet when this group of pupils left Year 2 fewer pupils reached the national expectations levels for their age than might be expected given their starting points.

The teaching of reading, including the sounds that letters make (phonics), is not helping pupils to make rapid progress and attain the standards of which they are capable. Teachers' subject knowledge is weak. Assessment of pupils' ability to read is inaccurate and unreliable because there is no clear baseline of pupils' skills in phonics. Where an assessment has been made of pupils' reading ability comparing this with their birthday age (reading ages), teachers have not made sure that pupils are given books to read at the appropriate level of difficulty and they do not set work in reading lessons ('guided reading') that reflects what pupils' know and can

already do. Consequently, teachers are not keeping a careful enough eye on the books pupils read or planning reading lessons well enough.

In most year groups, there is little challenge for the most-able pupils. For example, in mathematics, children in Reception were asked to complete tasks identifying pairs of numbers to make six and then move on to pairs of numbers to make ten. One child was already well able work with pairs or numbers that make 30 and beyond and to manipulate numbers over 100. The most-able pupils are not being given work that will help them to deepen their understanding of the number system as teachers' expectations of what pupils can be expected to do are too low.

From my discussions with governors and the headteacher, it is clear that relationships between both parties are currently strained. The governing body has a clear understanding that significant improvements are still required. Governors are well aware that teaching must improve in order that all pupils can achieve well. Records of governing body meetings show that they ask questions to challenge leaders to do better and are rightly requesting information about the impact of leaders' actions and the improvements being made to teaching. They are also aware that information on pupils' attainment and progress does not present a reliable or accurate picture from which to judge improvement. Governors are rightly planning to introduce a weekly meeting with you as headteacher to check that actions take place as planned.

If the school is to make rapid improvement extensive external support is required for the senior leadership team.

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 commissioning manager for improvement from the local authority has a clear understanding of the school's current position. The local authority has provided considerable support since the school's previous inspection. The commissioning manager is aware that this support has had little impact because some staff have found it difficult to make the best use of the advice provided.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**