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Mr Simon Wright
Headteacher
St Paul's CofE Primary School, Stalybridge
Huddersfield Road
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Cheshire
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Dear Mr Wright

Special measures monitoring inspection of St Paul's CofE Primary School, Stalybridge

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 2015, 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 which 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 which took place in February 2015.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. Various other documents were considered including the school's improvement file. Brief visits were made to all classes.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require special measures, there has been no significant change to staffing.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school has made a positive start on its journey of improvement. The school's headteacher demonstrates ambition for the school to make progress. The school's action plan indicates that a range of appropriate actions have already been taken

and will be taken to improve teaching, strengthen leadership and thereby raise achievement. These actions include: raising teachers' expectations; planning more engaging lessons; improving the feedback given to pupils; staff training including improving leadership at senior and other levels; and improving the support given to disadvantaged pupils.

The plan is not quite fit for purpose because, although it has some strengths, it also has some significant weaknesses around its manageability. A strength of the plan is that it demonstrates a clear determination to address all of the weaknesses identified by inspectors at the time of the last inspection. It also provides some useful overarching monitoring and evaluation milestones and measurable success criteria. However, the identified actions within each strand of the plan are not sufficiently prioritised, nor are they linked closely enough to the four key monitoring and evaluation milestones. As a consequence, the plan suggests the school is trying to move forward on 40 or so improvement activities all at the same time which is unrealistic and unmanageable. Similarly, some of the targets linked to the key milestones appear over-ambitious and unrealistic, particularly at the early stages of the school's planned journey of improvement.

Weaknesses apart, there is good synergy between the broad direction of travel of the school's action plan and the local authority's statement of action. It is clear that the local authority and school leaders have worked closely together to shape the broad aims of both documents.

With the help of the local authority, strong links have been established with successful local schools and with an early years provider in a neighbouring local authority. Useful improvement activities have already begun, including training and support on improving pupil assessment and moderation, strengthening leadership skills, developing early years provision and the coaching of teaching staff. Leadership roles within the school are being reviewed and clarified in order to strengthen the performance management of staff.

Although only short introductory visits to classrooms took place during this monitoring inspection, it was soon apparent that the school provides a positive environment for learning. Corridors and classrooms are bright and colourful and this is complemented by some interesting and vibrant displays of pupils' work. The pupils' attitudes to learning, although slightly variable, appeared generally positive and behaviour around school was good.

The relatively new Chair of the Governing Body has articulated convincingly her determination for the school's improvement. A full review of governance has been commissioned and will occur later this month. The outcome of the February

inspection was a shock for some governors, however, they have accepted the areas for improvement identified, including ensuring they hold the school to account for its performance. The Chair commented that governors are very supportive of the school but are also beginning to offer more challenge to its senior leaders to hold them more readily to account for its performance. A key and positive development is the formation of the Raising Achievement Group (RAG) that includes governor, school and local authority representatives and a very experienced diocesan representative. The RAG has already met to agree its terms of reference and will meet regularly to monitor closely the school's progress against the local authority and school's action plans. A review of the school's use of pupil premium funding (additional government money) has been commissioned and will take place later this term.

Since the inspection, the local authority has taken decisive action to support the school. Following the February inspection, meetings were quickly established to ensure all stakeholders, including the headteacher, governors, diocese and local authority, worked together to form an appropriate response and support for the school's recovery. The local authority has brokered support from an outstanding local school to improve leadership and specialist coaching support to aid the development of teaching and learning. Half-termly review meetings have been established to ensure the school remains on track on its journey of improvement.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Executive Director for Tameside and the Church of England Diocese of Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector