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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 with Doreen Davenport, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 4 and 5 November 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 previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

John Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in February 2015

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stages 1 and 2, so that it is at least good, in order to raise standards and ensure that pupils achieve well, by making sure that:
 - teachers have a well-informed view of what pupils already know and can do, so that they can plan work which builds on pupils' existing knowledge and skills and supports them in making rapid progress
 - all staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in their learning, and of their behaviour
 - all staff plan activities that will engage and challenge pupils, especially the most able, so that pupils maintain their focus, their attitudes to learning and behaviour are always good, and they learn quickly
 - all teachers have the skills necessary to make accurate assessments about the standards pupils are achieving and the feedback given to pupils evaluates their learning effectively
 - pupils' work is always marked, all pupils receive clear guidance on how to improve and staff check regularly that pupils are acting on this advice
 - disadvantaged and disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are supported effectively, so that they make the progress of which they are capable
 - pupils are given more opportunities to develop and extend their writing and mathematical skills in different subjects and do not repeat activities they have already mastered.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that the school's evaluation of its own work is accurate and based on rigorous and accurate checks on pupils' achievement, so that underperformance is quickly noticed and swiftly addressed
 - making effective use of assessment information to check on pupil's progress across classes and subjects
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels develop the skills to check on the quality of teaching with greater rigour so that any underperformance is quickly identified
 - ensuring that teachers are robustly held to account for the achievement of the pupils in their classes
 - providing all staff with high-quality training so that they improve subject knowledge and have a very good understanding of how pupils learn and make progress
 - providing further support and leadership-development opportunities for the senior leaders responsible for the early years, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, in order to improve the achievement of children in the Reception class and pupils with additional needs across the school

- improving the school's procedures for monitoring behaviour incidents so that leaders analyse patterns of behaviour and support pupils more effectively
- ensuring that governors are well informed about the school's performance and have the skills necessary to hold the school to account effectively.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 4 and 5 November 2015

Evidence

Inspectors observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the English lead coordinators, groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the local authority and the diocese.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, the school's action plan has been revised and is now fit for purpose. The senior leadership team has been restructured and some middle leaders have changed their responsibilities. A learning mentor and an intervention teacher have been appointed. Three members of staff are due to leave the school at the end of this term.

Outcomes for pupils

Standards are rising across the school. The school's national test results for 2015 show a reverse of the slump that occurred during the previous year. At Key Stage 1, standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are now broadly in line with those found nationally. Pupils did particularly well in reading with a higher proportion of pupils than found nationally reaching level 3. At Key Stage 2, the results of national tests indicate a marked improvement on the previous year with significant gains in attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. The biggest gain has been in mathematics with the proportions of pupils achieving levels 4 and 5 – exceeding those found nationally. Across the school performance in writing, particularly for boys, remains a key focus as standards, although improving, are not where they should be.

In lessons, there is still some variability in the progress that pupils make. At both key stages and across subjects, pupils make stronger progress when they are taught well and when their attitudes to learning are positively harnessed. Better achievement is being secured in mathematics as a result of teachers having a closer focus on students' individual strengths and areas for improvement and adapting their teaching accordingly. The school's work to improve pupils' achievement in English has been significant and this is having a positive impact on outcomes, particularly in speaking and listening skills, reading, and in aspects of technical writing such as punctuation and grammar. In several lessons observed by inspectors pupils used subject-specific vocabulary well when teachers encouraged this. Some pupils demonstrate weaker attitudes to learning and this causes minor interruptions to the flow of lessons and results in slower progress in learning.

The pupils' books across all classes show a marked improvement in outcomes. The range and volume of activity recorded in books has increased significantly and pupils are taking more care and showing pride in how they present their work. Pupils react positively to the increased feedback they receive through regular marking by teachers and this is contributing to improved outcomes over time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers are working hard across the school to improve pupils' learning. In the early years, activities are effectively planned, well-resourced and appropriately focused on developing early speaking and listening, reading, writing and number skills. Children in the early years cooperate well together and willingly share resources and follow simple rules to ensure a smooth transfer between activities. Assessment is used well to track the acquisition of skills and concepts; the children make good progress.

In Key Stages 1 and 2, teaching and learning are most effective when teachers use their good subject knowledge to provide interesting and challenging activities that capture the pupils' interest. This is supported by insightful questioning and timely activities to ensure good progress with not a minute wasted. At the start of a Year 6 mathematics lesson, the pupils were quickly given three timed 'challenges' that ranged in their level of difficulty from 'hard' to 'harder'. These were quickly followed by pupils being given a problem to solve where they had to select from a list of possible correct answers and then stand by the corresponding letter from those displayed around the classroom. The pupils clearly enjoyed this mathematical activity and there was no time for their concentration levels to wane or for them to become disengaged from learning. Similarly, in a Year 5 English lesson, the teacher quickly engaged the pupils' interest using a quick-fire introductory activity based on their topic 'spies'. This was followed rapidly by two activities that built sequentially on the first task, ultimately leading to the pupils writing a persuasive letter of application as to why they would make a good spy. The use of an audible timer to indicate to the pupils the time available for their task ensured their involvement and good levels of participation.

Where teaching and learning are less effective, pupils demonstrate weaker attitudes to learning, including a lack of interest. Sometimes teachers do not adapt tasks to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities.

Displays in classrooms and corridors around school are interesting and colourful. In classrooms the consistent use of English and mathematics 'learning walls' is helping pupils' understanding of key vocabulary and strategies for learning.

The effectiveness of teachers' marking of pupils work has improved significantly. Teachers identify strengths and targets in pupils' work and provide guidance that pupils find useful in supporting their learning; some of the marking is of a notably

high standard. Overall, the feedback that the pupils receive about how well they are progressing and what they need to do next to improve is proving effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The pupils' behaviour in and around the school is good overall. The pupils are polite, courteous and cope well with the intricacies of the school's building and split-level grounds. The pupils move well around school with little fuss and they are supervised well. Occasionally, a minority of pupils, some with specific emotional and social needs, behave less well but these instances are quickly addressed by staff. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in school is generally good but occasionally minor disruptions occur in lessons. A new behaviour management system is being introduced that aims to challenge poorer behaviour swiftly and reward good behaviour. Both younger and older pupils commented that school was a safe and friendly place to be; they know who to turn to should they need help and support from an adult.

Break and lunchtimes are well organised and run smoothly. Supervision at breaktimes on the playgrounds is effective and pupils enter the school in an orderly manner.

The pupils' attitudes towards learning vary quite considerably across the school. The majority of pupils display positive attitudes to school and welcome the opportunities afforded them in lessons. There are, however, a small minority of pupils, mainly boys, whose attitudes to learning are less than good and they easily become disinterested and lose concentration; teachers have to work really hard to ensure that these pupils remain motivated and on task. The work of the new learning mentor is aimed at supporting these pupils but it is too early to measure the success of this development. Attendance is good and lessons start on time.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Governors and senior leaders are pursuing their revised action plan to improve the school with vigour. The plan is sharper, contains an appropriate and manageable set of priorities and is proving an effective tool for improvement. Work to improve the quality of leadership and management and the effectiveness of teaching has included both individual coaching and whole-school staff development. Leaders and teachers are aware of their own strengths and improvement priorities. There is an increasingly open culture of sharing ideas and practice. The analysis of teaching observed in lessons, work seen in pupils' books and progress made by pupils over time based on formal assessments has been strengthened to enable leaders to make more secure judgements about the quality of teaching.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate and senior leaders know the school well. The impact of senior and middle leaders' work to improve teaching and learning and

raise standards is effective and shows good capacity for future improvements. An area that still requires a more cohesive approach by senior leaders is in addressing and supporting staff in reducing pupils' negative attitudes to learning in classrooms.

The Raising Attainment Group (RAG) formed to provide challenge and support to senior leaders has been very effective in focusing leaders' attention on the key areas for improvement. The RAG consists of the school's headteacher and deputy headteacher together with representatives from the local authority, the Diocese of Chester, the headteacher of a local school judged to be outstanding by Ofsted and the Chair and vice chair of the governing body. This group ensure that the school's improvement is rapid.

Vulnerable pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are being supported by the recently appointed learning mentor and the pupil premium champion. Although new to school, early indications of the impact of their work are positive. The deputy headteacher has recently taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator and this will enable a cohesive approach to overseeing the work of the additional support staff now working at the school.

The reviews of governance and of the school's use of pupil premium funding (additional government money to support pupils eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) recommended at the last section 5 inspection have now been completed. Governors have developed an action plan to direct their work and new governors have been appointed. The Chair of the Governing Body leads the governors effectively; she is knowledgeable about the school, understands the challenges it faces and is determined to secure better outcomes and life chances for the pupils it serves. The governors ask challenging questions which are increasingly focused on the impact of strategies to improve the school and raise educational standards.

External support

The support provided to the school from the local authority has been effective and well-received. The school's adviser knows the school well and has brokered support from other schools and individuals. This includes an associate headteacher to secure better leadership at the school and a teaching and learning coach to strengthen teaching. A leading practitioner has also been supporting the early years department. The experience and objectivity of these professionals has been invaluable in enabling school leaders to see how management systems can be improved and to help teachers reflect on their day-to-day practice. A representative of the diocese is supporting the school, particularly in aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. He is also helping with communication and sharing of strategies to enable the school to move forward.