

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Miss Kira Nicholls
Headteacher
St Paul's Community Primary and Nursery School, Spalding
Queen's Road
Spalding
Lincolnshire
PE11 2JQ

Dear Miss Nicholls

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Paul's Community Primary and Nursery School, Spalding

Following my visit to your school on 26 January 2016, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2015, 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils' progress improves to become consistently good across all classes
- ensure that the planned changes to the phonics curriculum are implemented quickly and monitored robustly to make sure they are making enough difference in raising standards in reading.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other school leaders and representatives of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a senior representative of CfBT, the contractor employed by the local authority

to support school improvement. I made short visits with you to observe learning in the Nursery, Reception, and Years 1, 2 and 4. We looked at pupils' work. I met with a group of Key Stage 2 pupils. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, the latest self-evaluation document and the school's records regarding bullying. I also considered the 28 responses on the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and the school's own survey of parental views, taken in October 2015. I spoke with a few parents as they dropped their children off for school at the start of the day.

Context

Since the previous monitoring visit in June 2015, there have been significant changes to staffing. The special educational needs coordinator left the school at the end of the autumn term. A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage joined the school in September. She will also take over the role of special educational needs coordinator in the next few weeks. A new subject leader for phonics was appointed in September 2015 but left the school at the end of the autumn term. The new phonics leader took up post at the start of this term. There have also been changes to the membership of the school's governing body, including the appointment of a new Chair of the Governing Body. A new business manager took up post in January 2016, following the departure of the previous business manager in November 2015.

Main findings

You know that results from the national tests in 2015 were poor. In particular, the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the 2015 Year 1 phonics check was exceptionally low. Standards fell in reading and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 1 from an already low base. While there was some improvement in writing, standards remained significantly below average. The attainment of disadvantaged pupils was similar to that of the other pupils in the school.

Some improvements were seen in results for the Key Stage 2 national tests, with attainment in mathematics, writing and the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test higher than in 2014. The school met the government's floor standards in 2015; this was not the case in 2014. Nevertheless, standards remained too low.

The school's current tracking information shows that progress continues to be uneven. You know that while teaching is improving, it is not consistently good enough in all classes to make up for previous underachievement. There is strong teaching in the school, for example in Year 3 and Year 6, and in these and some other classes pupils are now making better progress than before. However, even in Year 6, current levels of attainment remain too low despite the stronger teaching these pupils are now receiving. Progress in Key Stage 1 remains uneven because not all teaching is good enough. Where teaching is weaker, activities are not matched well enough to pupils' individual starting points and the pupils and the additional

adults who are there to support them do not understand clearly enough what pupils are supposed to do.

Actions to tackle the poor results in the 2015 phonics screening check have not been taken quickly enough. Changes in staffing have not helped. However, with support from another school, and through the appointment of a new leader for phonics, you have clear plans in place to strengthen the teaching of phonics and raise pupils' attainment in understanding the link between letters and the sounds they make.

You and your staff have secured some important improvements. The weaknesses in the school's curriculum arrangements which I reported in the previous monitoring letter have been tackled effectively. Good-quality information on the school's website provides parents with a clear picture of what their pupils are learning. The pupils I spoke with said how much they enjoy the creative tasks they are set to do at home through the paint palette homework challenges.

Much work has also been done to strengthen the school's assessment systems. The assessment leader has done a good job in introducing a new electronic data management system and delivering training so staff understand how to use it. You have also established a coherent approach to tracking pupils' progress each term. These strengthened assessment arrangements have also been accompanied by stronger systems to make sure the information teachers record about pupils' progress is more accurate than before.

Other leaders in the school are now playing a more effective role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in their phases. The early years leader, who started in September 2015, is making good use of her previous experience to bring about improvements to teaching and the curriculum. She has also begun to take on some of the additional responsibilities as the special educational needs coordinator.

You have also reorganised the phases to make the most of middle leaders' strengths and increase opportunities for collaborative planning between classes. You monitor the effectiveness of the phase leaders' work effectively. The phase leaders are skilled teachers who are committed to supporting their colleagues in ensuring that teaching is improving. They acknowledge, however, that they do not always have the time necessary to observe their colleagues' teaching to identify, precisely, how their teaching must improve to secure the necessary gains in pupils' progress.

Governors are carrying out their roles increasingly effectively through more regular monitoring of the school's work, including through first-hand visits to check that the actions planned have been taken and are making a difference. Governors have also made sure that they understand the school's new assessment system so they can better hold leaders to account. Governors say, though, that their effectiveness is being hindered by inconsistencies in the clerking arrangements.

The Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, shows a very mixed picture of parental opinions about the school. However, all but one of the 28 responses are from the previous academic year. Your own surveys of parents' views are much more positive; the 48 parents who responded to the school's questionnaire in October 2015 are overwhelmingly positive about the school. A few expressed concerns about bullying. You organised an information event for parents in response to this but only three parents replied to the invitation to attend. The few parents I spoke with at the start of the school day had mixed views, with some very positive and others very critical.

As at the time of the last monitoring visit, pupils reported to me that they feel safe at the school. They say that although bullying happens from time to time, it is always dealt with effectively by their teachers. All of those I met with said they have every confidence that staff will quickly tackle any worries they have. The school's records of bullying are carefully maintained and show that effective action is taken if ever it occurs.

External support

The local authority has provided additional funding to support the new scheme for delivering the teaching of phonics. It has also brokered support from another school to help with the introduction of the new phonics curriculum; it is too soon to see the impact of this because the changes have not yet been introduced. You are also benefiting from support from an external educational adviser. However, the external support provided has not been sufficient to ensure that the weaker teaching is improving quickly enough to accelerate pupils' progress. I recommend that further support is secured to focus sharply on quickly ensuring that all teaching is consistently of good quality.

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

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton
Her Majesty's Inspector