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Mr Simon Wright
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Dear Mr Wright

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

Following my visit to your school on 22 and 23 March 2016, 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 that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in February 2015. The full list of the areas for improvement that 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 newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Gornall
Ofsted Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that 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 that 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 pupils' 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 third monitoring inspection on 22 and 23 March 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, members of staff with specific responsibilities, a group of pupils, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the Diocese of Chester.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, there have been a number of staff changes: three members of teaching staff left the school in December and they have been replaced by new staff including a newly qualified teacher; an assistant headteacher has been appointed to begin duties at Easter. There are currently two members of teaching staff on maternity leave and their posts are being covered by temporary arrangements.

Following discussions with the Department for Education and the Chester Diocese Academy Trust, the school has recently consulted with parents, staff and other stakeholders on the proposal for the school to seek academy status.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors continue to pursue their school improvement action plan with appropriate vigour and determination. They are focusing on the right priorities: improving teaching and learning, managing the behaviour of pupils and strengthening leadership and management across the school. There is a coherent structure supporting their improvement agenda. Regular review meetings are held, including those of the Raising Attainment Group (RAG), so that governors, the local authority and other stakeholders are kept informed of the school's progress. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress against its priorities are written into a 'key dates' calendar to aid communication and ensure systematic review.

A new post of assistant headteacher has been created with the aim of strengthening leadership by recruiting a person with a set of skills and experience that will complement the work of current senior leaders. The recent appointee is experienced in working in a challenging primary school environment and will be responsible for developing behaviour management strategies and leading on mathematics across the school.

The school's updated self-evaluation document is accurate and reflects how well senior leaders know the school. The impact of senior and middle leaders' work to improve teaching and learning and raise standards continues to be effective. Staff have benefited from individual coaching sessions and whole-school training sessions. Leaders and teachers are more aware of their own strengths and improvement priorities and the increasingly open culture of sharing ideas and practice reported during the previous monitoring inspection has continued to flourish. Work to implement the new national

curriculum is well underway and resources, such as a new mathematics scheme, are being purchased to facilitate this.

The role of middle leaders is not yet fully effective, partly due to staff changes and the subsequent need to change roles, but also because the school's overall strategic direction in the past was unclear. Priorities are much more clearly focused now and roles and responsibilities clearly defined with a greater sense of accountability. There is an improved sense of teamwork among middle and senior leaders, including a willingness to try new things.

The school's governing body is stronger now than was the case at the time of the Ofsted inspection in 2015. The chair of the governing body leads the governors very effectively; she is knowledgeable about the school, understands the challenges it faces and is determined to strengthen its overall performance. The external review of governance that took place last year has been responded to meticulously and work has continued to improve the role and effectiveness of all governors. New governors have been appointed, including two members of the teaching staff, and this has fostered stronger governor–staff relationships as well as broadening the experience and skills set of the whole governing body.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Teachers and support staff continue to work hard to improve pupils' learning across the school. There are now more strengths and fewer weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning than at the time of the 2015 inspection.

In the early years setting, stimulating and imaginative indoor and outdoor activities are provided that capture the children's interest and their enthusiasm for learning. There is a clear focus on developing the children's early speaking and listening, reading, writing and number skills. The shared classroom space is vibrant with colourful displays and a wide range of learning opportunities provided for the children. Similarly, the outdoor area, although restricted in shape and size, is laid out effectively with exciting activities that promote the curiosity and imagination of the children. For example, some children were carefully pouring water into funnels and tubes so that it flowed onto a balanced piece of guttering and they noticed it pivoted due to the weight of the water flowing one way or another. Working with the teachers on the two carpeted areas, the children made good progress counting numbers to 10 and adding small numbers together. Some children can write numbers to 10 and add numbers together correctly. Occasionally, however, the activities provided for the children when they are allowed to freely choose for themselves are not sufficiently challenging or their purpose understood by the children. This results in a number of children wandering and flitting between areas of the classroom not really engaging in activities. For example, in the 'maths area' a worksheet had a picture of an Easter egg with numbers on it and the activity was for the children to match and colour in using a particular colour with a specific number. However, because this was not explained or understood by the children they just coloured the parts of the egg using any colours they liked so the intended mathematics was completely missed and within minutes the children moved

elsewhere.

In key stages 1 and 2, lessons are well planned with the learning challenge for each lesson clearly displayed and talked through with the pupils so they understand the purpose of what is being taught. Teaching is lively, enthusiastic and enhanced by teachers' good questioning skills. During lessons teachers usefully check that pupils understand what is being taught before moving on with new learning. Lessons are adapted to meet the needs of the pupils rather than following a fixed plan. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson the teacher, realising the majority of pupils understood and could follow a particular method of subtraction, decided appropriately not to over-complicate learning by adding a further method. As a consequence, the pupils could get on with practising and embedding the chosen method and in doing so achieved success, and importantly they were enjoying their mathematics. Across subjects, the work provided for the pupils in lessons is matched effectively to their prior attainment and represents a good level of challenge.

In most lessons, the relationships between teachers, support staff and pupils are good and this helps the teaching flow uninterrupted. Teachers are effective in motivating the pupils to listen well and contribute to question and answer sessions. Occasionally, when teaching and learning are less effective, those pupils not directly working with an adult demonstrate weaker attitudes to learning, including a lack of interest and urgency in completing their tasks. When this occurs teachers do not always set clear expectations of what is required to be attempted or completed by the end of the lesson.

In one particular year group at key stage 2, the quality of teaching and learning were adversely affected by the challenging behaviour and immature antics of a small minority of boys. Despite the best efforts of the teacher to motivate and re-engage the boys they stubbornly resisted the teacher's expectations.

Senior leaders are aware of the slightly volatile nature of this year group and additional classroom support has been provided. In addition, a full-time learning mentor has been appointed to identify and support vulnerable pupils.

Classroom learning environments have improved since the last monitoring inspection. There is greater consistency in the use of displays designed to support pupils' learning such as the 'working walls' for English and mathematics. Classrooms are well organised with good labelling of resources. The development of pupils' writing, which remains a key improvement priority for the school, is much more visible in classrooms and in open areas around school.

The effectiveness of teachers' marking of pupils' work continues to improve and the school's policy is more consistently applied across classes. Teachers celebrate pupils' achievements and provide them with helpful comments on how to improve their work. Those pupils who spoke with the inspector said they really appreciated the comments that teachers took time to provide. The feedback that the pupils receive about how well they are progressing and what they need to do next to improve is effective.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

With the exception of the occasional slippage in behaviour in isolated lessons, the vast majority of pupils behave well in and around the school. The pupils are polite, courteous and continue to cope well with the intricacies of the school's building and split-level grounds. The pupils hold doors open for visitors and politely say 'good morning' or 'good afternoon'. Pupils told the inspector that behaviour is getting better all the time and that aggressive behaviour, including fighting between pupils, is a thing of the past. The school's new behaviour management system with its clear and consistently applied menu of rewards and sanctions is liked and appreciated by the pupils. New reporting systems have been put in place to ensure parents and carers are better communicated with so they understand what is happening in school and how they can best support the school in modifying any unacceptable behaviour. 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 teaching staff go outside to welcome pupils back into the building and ensure they re-enter the school in an orderly manner. The majority of pupils display positive attitudes to school and welcome the opportunities afforded them in lessons. The work of the relatively new learning mentor is aimed at supporting those pupils with complex issues and early indications are that this is having a positive impact, particularly in promoting stronger school to home relationships. Attendance is good and lessons start on time.

Outcomes for pupils

As reported previously, the school's national test results in 2015 showed a reverse of the slump that occurred during the previous year.

The progress that current pupils make is less variable than was the case at the previous monitoring inspection. At both key stages and across subjects, pupils are making stronger progress because the quality of teaching has improved and is more consistent. Progress is particularly strong when teachers successfully foster the pupils' attitudes to learning. There is good evidence of teachers encouraging pupils to support each other and also offering critical but friendly advice to make outcomes stronger. In a Year 6 lesson for example, the pupils, working with their 'rally coach partner', successfully improved a set of written instructions by offering each other ideas and suggestions and correcting mistakes as they went along. The improved sets of instructions were then further enhanced by the whole class discussing each pairing's rewritten instructions and making further suggestions, including grammatical improvements. Pupils made strong progress as a result of this combined effort. Better achievement is being secured now in mathematics as a result of teachers encouraging pupils to be confident in working with and re-arranging numerical problems to notice patterns. In a Year 2 mathematics lesson, for example, pupils used a number line effectively and were able to see patterns in the answers they found when solving addition and subtraction problems. In several lessons observed by the inspector, pupils used subject-specific vocabulary well when teachers encouraged this.

External support

The support provided to the school from the local authority has been effective and well received. The school has benefited from the work of an associate headteacher, who, together with the local authority, has facilitated visits to, and support from, good and better schools locally. A representative of the diocese visits the school regularly and offers well considered support for the school's improvement agenda and longer-term goals.