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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Louise Knipe
Longford CofE (VC) Primary School
High Road
Britford
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP5 4DS

Dear Mrs Knipe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longford CofE (VC) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 December 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the teaching of comprehension strategies in reading across the school
- improve the record-keeping of vetting checks for staff
- ensure that pupils who underachieved last year catch up quickly and meet expected standards
- ensure that the most able pupils in key stage 2 are challenged consistently in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and two other staff, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We made short visits to lessons and scrutinised some examples of pupils' work. I talked with pupils in lessons and around the school and also talked to parents at the beginning of the school day. I met with the English and mathematics coordinators. I reviewed other school monitoring documentation such as the checks you have conducted on teaching and learning. I also reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements.

Main findings

Since January 2016 when you came into post you have created a calm and purposeful learning environment for pupils. You are building effective communication with parents. Those parents I talked to at the beginning and end of the day confirm your positive impact in tackling the school's weaknesses.

Your school improvement plan focuses on the right aspects for improvement. As headteacher, you have not shied away from making difficult decisions. Consequently, the momentum of school improvement is building and the school moving forward at pace. You, governors and other leaders are successfully monitoring the impact of your work. Rightly, you identify a need to tighten this aspect even further.

During my visit, I saw learning get off to a swift start at the beginning of the day with all pupils and adults engaged in purposeful early morning work, setting the scene well for pupils that every minute of learning is to be maximised.

The curriculum on offer is improving. Pupils value the thematic learning and visits they undertake. This gives clear purpose to their learning. Consequently, pupils have high levels of motivation to learn and want to achieve well.

Your actions have ensured that the early years and Year 1 classroom has undergone considerable change. The curriculum on offer now ensures that children in the early years have access to the learning they need. You are resolute in your aim for children to receive learning both through interactive play and small group direct teaching. Phonics teaching is systematic and regular and matched to children's needs. Parents' views are very positive about the progression of phonics work that their children are undertaking. The outdoor learning area is also improving and, while space remains limited, teaching is providing better opportunities for children to apply their learning outside.

Pupils now in Year 1 are receiving learning that is preparing them to be ready for

the Year 2 curriculum. However, some of these pupils underachieved last year. Work in books shows that progress is accelerating for these pupils because teaching builds on what pupils can do, know and understand.

Pupils currently in Year 2 have experienced a big jump in expectations on entry to the Years 2 and 3 class. This is because for some pupils the provision was not challenging enough when they were in Year 1 and some aspects of the play-based curriculum did not sufficiently prepare them for Year 2. As headteacher, you are managing this transition well. You are steadfast in your aim to ensure that any underachievement that was caused by previously weaker teaching is quickly eradicated. Consequently, this group of pupils are doing well and most are now making stronger progress than previously. You appropriately identify that this remains a key priority going forwards.

You have improved the impact of middle leaders across the school. As a result of training, your leaders focus on raising pupils' achievement and now undertake key tasks to measure pupils' progress over time. For example, the English leader has undertaken clear analysis of pupils' progress. She gathers examples of pupils' work to track and prove rates of progress from pupils' starting points in writing. This has enabled her to have an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses in school performance. As a result, workbooks confirm that pupils are catching up to meet standards expected for their age.

Improvement work in reading to develop pupils' understanding of the text they read is already underway but it is not yet fully effective. This is because, while the teaching of comprehension strategies is more regular, too many questions focus on retrieval of information and do not assess pupils' deeper understanding of the themes in the texts they are reading. There is internal capacity to improve this essential aspect of learning.

Since the last inspection there have been changes to the membership of the governing body. Roles and responsibilities have been strengthened. There is a new chair of the governing body in place. As headteacher, you have also instigated English subject visits from governors that enable them to hold the school to account against key milestones in the action plan. Mathematics visits are yet to happen but are planned.

You have started work to improve the level of challenge for the most able pupils at key stage 2. For example, activities planned are increasingly individualised to need and pupils benefit from teaching that builds specifically on what they already know. Teachers are making effective use of the 'chilli challenge' approach in mathematics in Years 4, 5 and 6, with different levels of challenge in each activity. Pupils enjoy this approach and are enthusiastic about mathematics. However, upper key stage 2 pupils could be challenged even more. These pupils are not getting difficult work quickly enough. This is limiting their exposure to work at the highest level to which they could apply their understanding. Seeking further advice in this regard from the

local authority and best practice locally will be important so that teaching results in deepening pupils' understanding in order that these pupils exceed the standards expected for their age.

Leadership action has resulted in most teachers accurately assessing pupils' work and planning for pupils' next steps well. You have introduced a new assessment system into the school. As teachers take control of this new system, you are sensible in your decision to ensure that ongoing work scrutiny supports the major judgements around assessment. This is helping staff to apply their understanding of assessment proficiently and plan the right work for pupils so that their progress strengthens.

Governors work closely with the school. They have benefited from local authority training and this is helping them hold the school to account more precisely. The school's action plan is focused and provides an accountability measure against which governors can monitor. However, some important aspects of their statutory duties are not yet effective and need to be prioritised. For example, governors need to ensure that record-keeping that relates to school staff appointments and checks are better organised and monitored regularly.

External support

The local authority has provided focused support. The school has made effective use of local authority subject advisers to increase leaders' skills in monitoring and evaluation of their subjects. Additional subject support is provided within network meetings which are attended and valued by the school. The local authority rightly identifies that it needs to maintain the current level of support. This is important to hold governors to account for meeting their statutory duties and to complete the induction programme for the headteacher so that she is fully accomplished in all aspects of monitoring and evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Carrington
Her Majesty's Inspector