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Dear Mrs Stanesby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Leonard's CofE (VA) First School

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 2017, 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 September 2016. 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 ensure that:

- leaders' evaluations take full account of emerging priorities and the findings from recent assessment information
- teachers adjust tasks if pupils find learning either too difficult or too easy
- teachers are given more opportunities to share what is working well
- the achievement and development of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is monitored with even more rigour.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the office manager, the governing body and Staffordshire's commissioning manager for school improvement, to discuss the actions taken since the last

inspection. The school improvement plan and self-evaluation were evaluated. I undertook a learning walk and book scrutiny with you to review the impact of teaching and the extent to which pupils are making progress over time. I reviewed a range of documents, including those related to the commissioning of support, adviser visit notes, the governing body's record of actions, the review of governance undertaken in November 2016, governing body minutes and the school's single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection you have recruited a class teacher and two teaching assistants. A new chair of governors took up post at the end of 2016. Classes have been reorganised. There are three classes in the morning and two in the afternoon. This allows children in Reception to learn together as one group in the mornings. The school has received a package of support from the local authority.

Main findings

At the last inspection, leaders and governors were asked to develop four key areas and undertake an external review of governance.

The first area for development was to improve leadership and management by ensuring that new teachers and subject leaders receive training and support; regular checks are made on teaching; the curriculum builds on pupils' understanding of British values; the website meets requirements; and governors hold leaders fully to account.

You and governors have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. You have triangulated the findings of a range of monitoring activities to ensure that your judgements about the impact of improvement work are reliable. The school development plan responds directly to the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You monitor the impact of your actions frequently and discuss this with governors.

New teaching staff and subject leaders have received a comprehensive programme of support. Much of this support has come from advisers commissioned by the local authority. Advisers have worked with subject leaders to audit their respective areas and prioritise actions. Work has focused on improving planning, teachers' subject knowledge and expectations. Pupils' books show that this support has had a positive impact. Pupils are making more progress over time and teachers are effectively supporting them to develop key skills.

You make regular checks on the quality of teaching and provide teachers with clear feedback. Areas for development are followed up in subsequent monitoring activities to ensure that improvements are being sustained. As a result, you have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. You are clear about where

further improvements are required. However, at this stage of the school's development, there are limited opportunities for teachers to learn from one another and share what works well.

Pupils that I spoke to during the inspection have a growing understanding of British values. They say that it is 'OK' to be different at St Leonard's. They are able to describe and explain the importance of democracy. The school has reviewed its vision and values. British values are interwoven into this new vision. The community is proud of its Christian ethos.

Governors have responded well to the external review that was commissioned in November 2016 and have made a series of changes to their work. Governors' minutes demonstrate that leaders are held to account for the school's overall effectiveness. The chair of governors has a very clear vision for the further development of the governing body and has devised new systems and procedures to make information as transparent and accessible as possible. Though challenge is evident, governors recognise that they must now take stock of improvements to date and keep an even closer eye on key issues.

The vast majority of the developments required to ensure that the school's website meets requirements are in place. However, recent changes to the curriculum need to be shared more widely with parents, and the impact of sports premium funding for the last academic year should be published as soon as possible.

The second area for development was to improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers plan work which meets pupils' needs; raise expectations and the level of challenge; only accept well-presented work; and adjust tasks as necessary to maintain pupils' engagement.

Leaders' monitoring records, pupils' books and assessment information show that the quality of teaching and learning is improving. However, there remains some variability. You are frank about how you currently judge the impact that teaching is having on standards. While there has been improvement, there is more to do in achieving greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school.

Teachers are not yet routinely adjusting activities in response to the checking of pupils' learning. As a result, on occasion, there is a lack of challenge for the most able children. Teachers' planning demonstrates that thought is given to different ability ranges, but teachers are not always confident in making changes during lessons where necessary.

Pupils' presentation is much improved. Pupils' books show clear improvement in the quality of handwriting over the last 12 months, as well as the pride they take in their work.

The third area for development was to raise achievement in reading and writing by

ensuring that good-quality phonics lessons are taught regularly; pupils read frequently and have books that match their ability; and teachers make sure that pupils know how to draft, edit and improve their writing, and enable pupils to use and apply correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Pupils' achievement in reading and writing has improved since the last inspection. Almost all pupils are making strong rates of progress. Teachers' judgements about pupils' achievement are moderated and discussed with advisers. Outcomes in pupils' books are regularly scrutinised.

Leaders have identified that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities did not make as much progress as other pupils in the last academic year. I reviewed provision for this group of pupils during the inspection and spoke to staff about pupils' needs. It is clear that strategies are in place to provide the right support. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities must remain a key focus of your monitoring to ensure that this support has sufficient impact on progress over time.

Standards in phonics are improving. Teaching is well organised and a culture of reading is being firmly established. I met with pupils in the 'Flames' class. They were able to tell me about the new scheme for reading and how they find books that match their different abilities. You and your staff have also created a new library area which is bright and inviting. During the inspection, pupils were engrossed in their reading.

Pupils have a growing awareness of how to draft, edit and improve their writing. This process was evident in pupils' books and is a focus of teachers' feedback. I reviewed a range of writing books and could see clear progress from pupils' different starting points.

Grammar, punctuation and spelling skills are also a focus of teachers' planning and feedback. Pupils' skills are developing over time and any misconceptions are being addressed. The improvements within English must now be maintained and embedded.

The fourth area for development was to improve provision in the early years by ensuring that teachers plan activities that engage children and promote progress.

The early years has developed considerably. Children now learn as a separate group during morning sessions. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the Reception Year has risen since 2016 and compares favourably to the national figures. Children have access to a rich learning environment.

External support

Following the last inspection, the local authority commissioned a review of the school and devised a programme of support. Leaders and governors have engaged well with this support. Purposeful and productive relationships have been developed with advisers. As a result, you have brought about many key improvements. Leaders and governors, and the local authority, rightly identify that these improvements must now be sustained and embedded.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector