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Mrs Whitehead
Headteacher
St Mark's Church of England Primary School
Red House Lane
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Dear Mrs Whitehead

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mark's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 March 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- enhance engagement with parents and carers to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality
- ensure that the quality of teaching across the school is consistently good or better.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. I also met with pupils both formally and informally. I met with four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's self-evaluation documentation and improvement plan, visited classrooms to see pupils and looked at their work in books. I scrutinised the school's information

about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I looked at a range of evidence and documents, including minutes of the governing body meetings, performance management information and monitoring reports from the local authority school improvement service. I spoke with a number of parents and carers at the start of the school day.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new chair and vice-chair of the governing body and two additional governors have been appointed. New teaching appointments have been made, including a new leader of the early years who took up the post in January 2018. There have been a number of staff absences. There has also been a fall in the number of pupils on roll.

Main findings

Following the last inspection, you have taken effective action to strengthen the impact of leadership on the quality of teaching and to improve pupils' progress. The reorganisation of the leadership structure within the school has established clear lines of accountability. This allows leaders and staff to be held more stringently to account. Leaders, including governors, have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have identified key priorities in a well-constructed plan for improvement.

Leaders' high expectations have been well communicated and are shared by staff. Leaders and governors have ensured that more-effective performance management systems hold teachers closely to account for the progress that pupils make. You do not hesitate to take appropriate action to tackle any underperformance you identify.

Additional training ensures that your leadership team have the skills and knowledge they need to improve the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility. As a result, they provide teachers with appropriate guidance and advice to improve their practice, for example giving staff the opportunity to work alongside other colleagues, sharing their knowledge and expertise.

Leaders have refined the systems in place to check the progress pupils make to ensure greater accuracy. Detailed analysis of information enables leaders and governors to hold teachers accountable for the progress pupils make. Teachers' improved subject knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn enable them to use assessment information to inform their planning. As a result, learning activities more accurately meet the needs and interests of pupils and provide appropriate challenge, including for the most able pupils. Teachers quickly identify any pupils who are struggling and give them the help they need to catch up quickly. As a result, pupils now make better progress, particularly in reading and mathematics.

Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, work in pupils' books shows that they take pride in their work. The standard of presentation and the quality of pupils' work are improving. The accuracy of pupils' spelling,

punctuation and grammar has improved as a result of improvements in teachers' knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn. Pupils know what they need to do to improve their work and enjoy the challenges set by teachers.

Teachers ensure that pupils apply their skills and knowledge in other subjects across the curriculum. For example, in science, older pupils use their mathematical knowledge to interpret data and produce graphs relating to the experiments they carried out.

In the 2017 key stage 2 national assessments, pupils' progress in reading was in line with the national average, and better than the national average in mathematics. You are not complacent, and recognise that you have to improve the rates of progress pupils make, particularly in writing, so that a higher proportion reach the standards expected by the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. Although improving, some disadvantaged pupils' weaker attendance is hindering the progress they make. There are still some inconsistencies in the quality of how phonics is taught. As a result, pupils are unable to apply their phonic knowledge accurately in their own writing. Some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching still remain, particularly in key stage 2. This limits the progress pupils make, particularly in writing. However, you are taking the appropriate actions to bring about the improvements necessary.

As a result of training from the local authority, governors have grown in confidence and provide increased levels of challenge for leaders, particularly around the impact of the actions leaders have taken to improve outcomes for pupils. Governors ensure that they remain vigilant, particularly about the use of additional funding and the challenges faced by smaller numbers of pupils in key stage 1. They are not complacent, and recognise the remaining key priorities for improvement, particularly, the quality of teaching and parental engagement to improve punctuality and attendance.

External support

The local authority has worked closely with the school to broker external support and training. It meets regularly with leaders and governors to monitor the impact of the support it has provided. Leaders have actively sought guidance from other colleagues, in other schools, to share good practice, provide training for staff and to quality assure their judgements. Leaders are also part of the national writing project and a project with the local authority for the effective deployment of support staff.

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 Stockport. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer
Her Majesty's Inspector