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Mrs Steph Matthews
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Matthews

Short inspection of St Paul's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 15 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in November 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You and other leaders, including governors, are dedicated, enthusiastic and ambitious for the pupils. You do not accept excuses in holding others to account, so that the pupils can thrive. Since your appointment, you have overseen several strategic changes. These include restructuring staff and leadership positions, as well as adapting the structure of classes so that they evolve continually with the changing needs of the pupils and school community. You have managed this admirably so that pupils, especially those from the most challenging backgrounds, including refugees, are well supported socially, emotionally and academically. This has been acknowledged through your recent award as a 'school of sanctuary' this year.

The quality of education is good. Pupils enjoy their learning and make valuable contributions in lessons. From their time in Reception, they are taught to be independent and to make the right choices to support their learning. You ensure that there is a balance between learning essential knowledge, and critical communication, language and literacy development. This is achieved through well-organised play as well as more formal activities in reading, writing and mathematics, to enable children to make strong progress from the start. Children start well below the typical stages of development in Reception, but, by the time they leave the school in Year 6, the majority of pupils have made strong and sustained progress to catch up with their peers nationally in reading, writing and

mathematics. Pupils, parents and carers are keen advocates of the school. They are proud and recognise the extra steps taken by staff on a daily basis. A typical view of parents included the comment: 'I can't rate this school highly enough! When my daughter started last year she was very shy. This school has brought her confidence out.'

Since the previous inspection, you have been focused on tackling the issues raised at that time. You have particularly targeted phonics as an area for improvement. This is working well so that, despite their very low starting points, most pupils who have not met the phonics standard in Year 1 catch up by Year 2. Comparisons with the national average are made difficult because there are such high proportions of pupils who speak English as an additional language. In 2017, for example, this was as high as 62%. However, you recognise that there is still more to do in accelerating pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of phonics so that pupils can be more proficient in reading and writing sooner. As such, some pupils are still not meeting this benchmark quickly enough, which delays their ability to read and, consequently, their learning across the curriculum.

We also agreed that it is imperative to continue raising pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 1 in reading, mathematics and particularly writing. Currently, despite the good progress made by pupils to start catching up, large proportions do not meet the standards expected of their age. This means they are not always as well prepared for the challenges of key stage 2 as they need to be.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff are diligent and skilled in caring for all pupils, including those who are most vulnerable. Your dedicated pastoral team takes a strong lead in working effectively with pupils who have a range of complex needs. However, all staff are like-minded in a school which places pupils' needs and well-being at the heart of its work. There is a strong culture of safeguarding. You ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. As a result, staff are knowledgeable and aware. Their vigilance and swift actions have been instrumental in keeping pupils safe in a range of different circumstances. You also work effectively with a range of external agencies in championing the needs of pupils in your school.

Pupils told me that they feel safe. They know how to stay safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet and on the road and how to respond in the event of a fire. Pupils know what bullying is. They are unanimous in their view that bullying seldom happens in St. Paul's. On the rare occasions when bullying or other anti-social behaviour occurs, pupils believe that staff act quickly to intervene, as it is not tolerated. Pupils appreciate each other and celebrate difference as part of the school's diverse culture. You work highly effectively with pupils who have difficult life experiences, including refugees and asylum seekers, to give them the stability, reassurance and conditions they need to feel safe and thrive.

Inspection findings

- The main lines of enquiry for the inspection focused on pupils' learning, understanding and acquisition of phonics in order to support their development in early reading and writing.
- You have introduced a robust daily phonics programme so that teachers teach phonics sessions as a priority each day. These sessions are well planned to take account of the pupils' different abilities and starting points. As a result, pupils are being taught letters and the corresponding sounds they make in segmenting to spell, as well as learning how to blend sounds to decode and read. Children are learning to do these things with increasing accuracy and confidence to get them 'set up' for the next stage.
- Pupils enjoy the range of phonics activities and games. This makes learning letters and sounds enjoyable and motivates them to learn well. However, there are times when some pupils do not listen actively or take part fully, which impedes their learning.
- Teachers check pupils' phonics knowledge and use assessment information to plan their next steps. Their assessments are accurate and reliable. However, teachers do not consistently plan precise enough next steps to meet the full range of pupils' needs, especially for some targeted pupils who have to catch up quickly. A lack of highly refined or short-term targets means the rate of learning for some targeted pupils is still too slow.
- Listening to different pupils read in Year 1 and Reception showed their strong progress from the time that they started in the school, often with no knowledge of letters and sounds at all. However, too many still have phonics books which are not well matched to their phonics ability. These tend to be too hard. This prevents the pupils from increasing speed and confidence in reading, and especially from being able to understand what they have just read.
- Other inspection activities evaluated how well children were being supported in the early years. This is because outcomes in the early years are perennially much lower than the national average for children attaining a good level of development.
- You and other leaders, including governors, have rightly recognised the low outcomes seen at the end of Reception. As a result, from September 2017, you have invested heavily in a restructuring of the early years and Year 1.
- Governors check the ongoing improvements in the early years and hold leaders to account, including through visits linked to milestones on the school development plan. This shows children are gaining confidence in a range of situations and play intended to improve their outcomes. For example, only 4% of children entered at a typical level of development in September 2017. Currently, 55% of children are beginning to work on age-appropriate (40-60 months) goals to catch up with their peers.
- Finally, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 in mathematics, reading and writing is below expected standards. Workbooks and other analyses show that

pupils are progressing well but are not consistently securing basic skills, knowledge and understanding by the time they leave Year 2. In particular, pupils' limited knowledge of vocabulary restricts their choice of words to add detail in writing. Additionally, common weaknesses in spelling and punctuation prevent pupils from meeting age-appropriate standards, including at greater depth.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- plan precise next steps to accelerate pupils' phonics knowledge and skills further towards meeting the standards of the Year 1 phonics screening check
- match pupils' phonics books closely to their phonics knowledge and ability, to enable them to make stronger progress
- raise standards by the end of key stage 1 in mathematics, reading and particularly writing, through improving pupils' knowledge of vocabulary, spelling and grammar.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I worked extensively with you, including hearing readers in Reception and Year 1 and observing the range of phonics sessions from Reception to Year 2. I checked the accuracy of teachers' assessments through checking pupils' phonic knowledge directly with them. I also talked with pupils during lessons and observed children in different contexts in the Reception class. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters, including staff recruitment, training and vetting arrangements. I spoke with pupils and staff about their views of safeguarding. I also reviewed evidence of various referrals and communications with external agencies for safeguarding pupils.

I met with representatives of the governing body and reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and a sample of records of governors' visits. I took full account of the five responses on Parent View as well as reviewing the free texts received through the inspection. To supplement this, I met directly with some parents and took account of the school's own survey from the autumn term, which contained 69 responses. I had a discussion with the local authority adviser to confirm the views and support of the local authority.