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28 January 2019

Mrs Louise Sennett  
Executive Headteacher  
St Helen's CE Primary School  
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Hemsworth  
Pontefract  
West Yorkshire  
WF9 4EG

Dear Mrs Sennett

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's CE Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 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 not 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:

- embed a consistent approach to the teaching of reading across the school, ensuring that books for younger pupils match their phonics needs accurately
- ensure that all teachers use the new assessment system incisively to plan work that accurately matches pupils' needs, in each key stage and subject
- rapidly equip subject leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
- evaluate rigorously the extent to which additional pupil premium funding is improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the chief executive officer of the Enhance Academy Trust (EAT) and three members of the governing body, including the chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and subject action plans were evaluated. I undertook short visits to lessons with your deputy headteacher and your key stage 1 leader, observing teaching and learning in each key stage. I talked and read with pupils in lessons. I examined pupils' reading records and work in books and on display. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including governors' minutes, safeguarding and attendance information, notes of visits from national leaders in education (NLE) and EAT colleagues, including your EAT improvement partner, and from the Department for Education's regional schools commissioner for Lancashire and West Yorkshire. I took your own survey responses from staff and the 11 Parent View responses into consideration.

## **Context**

You are new to post since the previous inspection, taking up your appointment in September 2018. A key stage 1 leader is due to take up a permanent post in January 2019 and has been working with you on a part-time basis since September 2018. A second deputy headteacher has been appointed to start in January 2019, when she will become the leader for English. Most subject leaders are new to post. There have been several changes in staff since the previous inspection, including five new appointments to the teaching staff and an equivalent number leaving.

## **Main findings**

Since taking up the position of executive headteacher, you have undertaken a thorough review of current practices and systems across the key stages. You have created a plan for improvement which is firmly focused on improving pupils' outcomes and takes due heed of the previous inspection's recommendations. In forming your vision for the future, you have included staff, governors and EAT partners. Your honesty and approachability are commended by others. Consequently, staff are optimistic, morale is positive and there is a shared understanding of what needs to happen next to bring about essential improvement.

You have taken action to make some important changes which are showing early signs of success. For example, pupils' attendance has very recently improved, and the proportion of pupils who are regularly absent from school has reduced. This is a much-needed accomplishment. Prior to this term, since the previous inspection, pupils' attendance dropped further below national averages and the proportion of pupils who were regularly absent rose higher.

You have acted swiftly following the drop in Year 1 phonics outcomes to well below the national average in 2018. You have implemented training for staff and altered the way sessions are delivered. Although variability in the quality of teaching and

learning in phonics remains, current pupils' needs are being planned for more meticulously.

You have ensured that safeguarding and the protection of pupils have been given a high priority. Staff are confident in their understanding of the most recent guidance and documentation. Records and logs are detailed and well maintained. The pastoral leader is working closely with families and external agencies to ensure that any vulnerabilities are managed effectively. Leaders are starting to analyse records in greater depth to seek patterns and to respond promptly to priorities identified.

Despite these signs of improvement, you, EAT partners and others recognise that progress from the previous inspection has been too slow. Leaders' actions since then have not addressed the recommendations successfully. For example, the quality of teaching and learning remains inconsistent, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils is too variable and pupils' books show that progress in writing continues to be an area requiring urgent attention.

Currently, there is not a consistent approach to the teaching of reading. Pupils' books are not reliably well matched to their phonics needs. Some pupils read too infrequently with adults, and teachers' records capturing the breadth of pupils' reading choices vary in quality. As a result, too many pupils struggle to build banks of vocabulary appropriate to their age; they fail to read with fluency or confidence at the standards expected for their age. This inattention to reading processes and practices is contributing to pupils' persistently weak progress in writing.

You have introduced new assessment systems to support and challenge staff to plan more accurately for pupils' needs. Staff have welcomed the training that has taken place to help them use systems effectively. It is too soon to see whether this resource will be a successful contributor in raising pupils' outcomes.

Most leaders are new to post or due to take up post. They value the opportunities that you are affording them to acquire skills of leadership and the manner in which you challenge and support them to make a difference for pupils. To date, however, they have had little time or opportunity to raise outcomes for pupils. Several need additional investment in developing their skills and experience to become effective experts in improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The effect of additional pupil premium funding is unclear. Spending plans have not been evaluated effectively or communicated clearly to governors. The website currently shows no spending plan for the current academic year. Governors' minutes do not demonstrate that governors challenge and hold leaders fully accountable for the progress made by disadvantaged pupils.

### **External support**

EAT actions to date have not brought about rapid improvement. The trust has, however, responded in earnest recently to assist you in securing more rapid

improvement for the school. Additional resources, including staffing, have been made available. You have drawn support from partners within the trust and have actively sought reviews of current performance from external partners, including NLE and senior leaders in education, to corroborate and moderate your findings. This proactive approach and joint working with and beyond your EAT partners is enabling you to see clearly the required direction of travel.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Leeds (CE), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**