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Mrs Wright  
Executive Headteacher  
St Peter's CofE (VC) First School  
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Dear Mrs Wright

### **Short inspection of St Peter's CofE (VC) First School**

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 2019, 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 October 2014.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

St Peter's is at the heart of the Marchington village community. Pupils like coming to school and parents speak highly of their children's experiences here. The grounds of the school are extensive and well used. The school is federated with Talbot First School and shares one governing body. You now lead both schools and have worked hard over the last 18 months to bring about some key improvements. There have been changes in both leadership and staffing at St Peter's since the last inspection.

Following your appointment as headteacher in September 2017, you quickly reviewed the school's effectiveness and identified a number of key priorities. Central to this has been the introduction of a new assessment system. Staff are now confidently using what they know about pupils' performance to inform their planning and meet pupils' needs. Due to small pupil numbers, it can sometimes be difficult to draw meaningful analysis from assessment data. Staff therefore carefully review individual pupil performance and, where appropriate, establish additional support.

However, due to changes in staffing and inconsistency in the overall quality of teaching, outcomes have been variable in recent years. This is particularly the case

in phonics in Year 1, and reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 1. Although you have secured several important improvements, there is more work to do in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning further. There are some key weaknesses in the delivery of phonics and the wider curriculum that have not been fully addressed.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of exciting experiences. The whole school recently visited a theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme to watch a production of 'The Wind in the Willows'. The impact of experiences like this are evident in displays and pupils' work. Pupils say they enjoy learning. During the inspection pupils' behaviour was exemplary. This is an inclusive school with a very positive atmosphere.

Staff are very proud of the school. Several wrote letters to me expressing their commitment and pride. One member of staff wrote: 'We are a happy school that puts well-being at the centre of everything we do (for both staff and children).' This view was typical of other responses.

Parents value your leadership, the relationships that staff have with pupils, and the wraparound care. Every parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, stated that they would recommend St Peter's to another family. Typical comments from parents included: 'The staff really care for the children,' and 'I feel lucky that my children can start their education in such a nurturing environment.'

At the last inspection, leaders and governors were asked to accelerate the progress made by the most able pupils and raise achievement in mathematics and writing. Books demonstrate that pupils are now regularly presented with challenges in their learning, particularly in mathematics. Staff have used training to adapt their mathematics planning and devise frequent opportunities for pupils to use and apply their problem-solving skills. As a result of a range of effective support, from both local schools and the local authority, teachers are focused on improving pupils' basic skills. However, this stronger planning and delivery are not as evident in the wider curriculum.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding at St Peter's. Staff know how to manage a concern about a pupil and talk with confidence about the training that they receive. Concerns are identified quickly, and leaders work effectively with external agencies to secure the right support.

The school's single central record is compliant, and leaders and governors have received training to ensure that staff are appropriately vetted before they join the school. You and the staff have created a particularly inclusive ethos. Pupils say they feel safe and parents are very appreciative of the support they receive.

## Inspection findings

At the start of the inspection we agreed a number of key lines of enquiry to ascertain if the school remains good.

- In 2018, whole-school absence rose above national levels. Your records show that this was due to the absence of a few individual pupils and the impact this had on the whole-school data. You and your team regularly analyse pupils' attendance. On the day of the inspection attendance was 100% and very few pupils have low attendance.
- You have adopted a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. Pupils are placed in groups and taught the relevant phase of learning according to their needs. You review what pupils can do and what they need to improve further at regular intervals. You have also developed expertise and some key strengths in teaching. However, the quality of teaching in phonics is variable. There is currently limited oversight or monitoring of teaching due to staff changes. As a result, you are not able to focus on specific developments or identify how any strengths will be shared. The books that pupils take home do not always match the sounds that they are learning at school. This hinders the progress pupils are able to make. You have further training planned to support the development of phonics but greater urgency is required.
- Though pupils experience an exciting range of activities, not enough thought and care has gone into what knowledge and skills will be acquired over time. It is not clear how learning in the humanities in key stage 2 prepares pupils for further learning in middle school. In history, some significant historical events and time periods are not taught sequentially. Teachers' long-term plans do not include sufficient detail or information about what, why and when different concepts will be introduced to pupils. As a result, pupils' acquisition of subject-specific skills, knowledge and understanding is variable and in some classes it is weak.
- Governors commissioned an external review of their effectiveness last year. They have used findings from this review and other analysis to undertake a full audit of their skills. They have attended a range of training to ensure that they are able to offer a better level of challenge and support. Governors' overall strategic impact is improving. They have a much better handle on assessment information and whole-school priorities. However, they do not yet have enough opportunities to consider and debate the overall effectiveness of the school. At this point in their development, they do not fully understand the content of the school's self-evaluation and development plans. As a result, they do not have a clear understanding of some of the priorities that have been identified at this inspection or how these issues will be monitored.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is greater oversight of the teaching of phonics so that any areas for development can be acted upon quickly
- staff are given further training in the delivery of phonics so that they develop greater expertise and have more opportunities to fully share the things they know work best
- leaders monitor more closely how well the books that pupils take home and those they read in school are matched to the sounds they are learning
- greater thought and care are given to the design and delivery of the curriculum in, and across, all key stages
- governors have greater involvement in the whole-school self-evaluation and development planning process so that they are able to monitor the impact of leaders' actions more fully.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield, 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**

## **Information about the inspection**

I met with you and one of the senior teachers at the start of the inspection to discuss the school's overall effectiveness. I observed teaching in all classes. Observations were undertaken jointly with you and a senior teacher. During one observation we reviewed learning in pupils' books. We also undertook a separate work scrutiny where we focused on pupils' progress in history and geography.

I held a meeting with eight members of the governing body including the chair and vice-chair of governors. I reviewed a range of school documentation, including the single central record, child protection files, attendance analysis, assessment information, curriculum overviews, action plans, minutes from meetings of the governing body, and the school self-evaluation.

I took account of feedback from the 18 respondents to the Parent View survey and the 17 free-text responses. There were no responses to the pupil or staff surveys. I received five handwritten letters from staff and met with parents at the start of the school day.