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Mrs Helen Darrell
Headteacher
St Pauls CofE VA Primary School
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Dear Mrs Darrell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Pauls CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 2019, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen school improvement planning so that success criteria are measurable, deadlines are explicit and it is clear how progress will be monitored and evaluated.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, governors and a representative of the local authority to review the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We spent time in classrooms to see the school in action and looked at examples of pupils' work. I checked a range of documents, including the school's single central record of pre-

appointment checks.

Context

You joined the school in January 2019 as its permanent headteacher. Prior to your appointment, the school was led by two part-time, interim headteachers after the previous substantive headteacher left the post. An interim deputy headteacher was seconded to the school for the academic year. She is due to return to her employing school at the end of the summer term 2019. A permanent deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in September 2019.

Main findings

In the two terms that you have been headteacher, you have developed an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You are realistic and honest in assessing the progress that the school has made since the previous inspection. You are clear about the work that is left to do. You have quickly brought about changes, such as the ongoing review of the school's curriculum, that are helping the school to improve.

Governors also have a good understanding of the school's current position and its recent history. A review of governance was carried out by the local authority. Governors are using its findings to help them to develop their effectiveness. They understand the need to balance their challenge to you and other leaders with the need to support you.

The school's action plan covers all the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The plan includes a range of appropriate actions, focused on the key priorities identified. You have annotated and evaluated your copy of the plan and it is clear that you review it regularly. Your checking indicates that progress is being made towards achieving your improvement aims.

The plan requires some refinement in order for it to be fully effective in helping the school to improve. For example, it does not identify an individual to be responsible for each action, often referring to groups such as the senior leadership team. It does not include clear dates and deadlines for when actions should be completed, or milestones to indicate what leaders expect to be achieved and by when. Success criteria are not sharp enough and, frequently, are not measurable. It is not clear how the plan will be monitored or progress evaluated.

Leaders have taken a range of suitable actions to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, in order to improve communication with parents, the school's newsletter has been redesigned to include information about pupils' learning, and it is being issued regularly. You make yourself available to parents, so that they can ask questions and raise concerns at an early stage. Positive changes have been made in the way that the school reports

to parents about what their children are doing and how well they are achieving.

Leaders have also done a great deal to improve other identified areas. For example, assessment practice has been improved and there is now an assessment schedule in place that provides a clear overview of assessment throughout the academic year. The document makes leaders' high expectations for pupils' progress very clear. Successful action has also been taken to improve the early years provision. For example, work has been carried out to improve the outdoor area. The outdoor environment is now much better suited to the needs of young children and activities are more focused on learning.

The results of the 2019 national assessments show a somewhat mixed picture. However, pupils' outcomes are more positive overall. These include improvements in key stage 1, in mathematics in key stage 2, in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Year 1. The improvements in phonics were particularly notable. Although the proportion of pupils that met the national benchmark in the Year 1 phonics screening check remained below average the proportion was much higher than in the previous year.

Pupils appear happy and settled throughout the school. They behave well and follow the instructions that they are given. In some classes, pupils are beginning to show very good attitudes to learning. Pupils are clearly interested in the work that they are given to do. Teachers provide them with a range of interesting activities and learning experiences and this is encouraging good attitudes. The work in pupils' books shows that they are making more progress than previously. However, it also shows that there is more to do in terms of continuing to improve pupils' attainment and progress in writing. You are aware of this and are taking steps to improve this important area.

Parents are very positive about the school and they feel that it is improving. They have noticed a range of changes including the improving curriculum and an increase in school trips and visitors to the school. One parent said that they feel that the school has had 'an injection of joy and positivity'. Another said, 'I now feel that my children go to a school where they are nurtured and challenged.' These views were typical of the comments received.

External support

The local authority is supporting the school well. It has a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, the progress made and the work left to do. The local authority's representative visits the school frequently. She chairs regular improvement group meetings to both challenge and support leaders and governors. The local authority has also provided specialist adviser support in English, mathematics and the early years. The positive impact of this support is particularly evident in the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector