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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mr Chris Partridge
Headteacher
St Paul's Church of England VC Junior School
Paul Street
Shepton Mallet
Somerset
BA4 5LA

Dear Mr Partridge

Short inspection of St Paul's Church of England VC Junior School

Following my visit to the school on 23 January 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 February 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 have continued to lead the school with rigour and an unrelenting ambition on behalf of the pupils. Your often-repeated phrase of 'no excuses' pervades in a school where other leaders share your aspirations and values. As a result, pupils are effectively supported and challenged to achieve well. Pupils leave the school having caught up well in reading, writing and mathematics and are well prepared for the next stage in their learning. Pupils, parents and carers all recognise the high-quality teaching, learning and assessment in the school. For example, a typical view from a parent was: 'My daughter has developed so much during her time at St Paul's. We could not be happier with her progress and the support we have received from the staff.' Another said, '[This is] an amazing school. I moved my daughter here two years ago and that was the best decision I ever made!'

You work effectively with a group of like-minded and well-trained leaders, including governors who are equally passionate about getting the best for pupils. The investment in training effective middle and senior leaders ensures that there is strong capacity for the school to continue improving. Indeed, this is seen through the fact that you are currently supporting another school on a temporary basis. In the meantime, the deputy headteacher is ably stepping in to provide short-term interim leadership at St Paul's.

You have ensured that effective processes and systems are firmly established to check pupils' progress and intervene swiftly when help is needed. In addition, you have taken effective action to ensure that vulnerable pupils can access and benefit from high-quality emotional support, care and counselling. This is helping them to cope with a range of challenging situations and to enjoy their education.

The quality of education is consistently strong across the school. It enables pupils who arrive at the school with different needs, including those who speak English as an additional language, to settle quickly and begin making good progress from the start. Teachers check what pupils know, understand and can do as part of their ongoing dialogue with pupils. They use assessment information effectively to plan the right steps to build pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities also achieve well. However, as we discussed, some do not make even more rapid progress because targets on their individual learning plans (ILPs) are not sufficiently precise to help them overcome barriers within short, focused periods of time.

You have worked successfully to address weaknesses identified through the school's last inspection. In particular, you not only improved the physical aspect of the library in the school but, more importantly, took the time to consider how this should be part of a drive to promote a strong culture for reading. Other leaders have also been instrumental in revising the school's approach to reading. Reading is celebrated and enjoyed. The introduction of a reading strategy since the last inspection has seen reading outcomes improve markedly; in fact, in 2017 pupils' progress in reading was in the top 25% of schools nationally.

However, you are not complacent and recognise that there is more work to be done to continue the school's improvement. We agreed that the achievement of some disadvantaged pupils remains a high priority, including the most able disadvantaged pupils. Disadvantaged pupils are well supported to catch up quickly in reading, writing and mathematics but there is still a difference between their attainment and that of other pupils. Furthermore, our close examination of the progress of girls in mathematics led us to agree that the mathematics curriculum is sometimes too narrow, which can slow the progress and limit the enjoyment of a few pupils.

Safeguarding is effective.

You promote a strong culture for safeguarding pupils and make this the highest priority. In the first instance, you ensure that staff pre-employment checks and training are fit for purpose. Volunteers and governors are also vetted rigorously. Systems are stringent and record-keeping is well maintained so that staff handle information effectively. This helps to ensure that you and your staff record, refer and escalate concerns quickly and challenge professional partners to keep pupils safe. Staff, including those who are new to the school, are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures and arrangements. You 'go the extra mile' to look after pupils, including, for example, contacting other schools and authorities if you are

concerned that pupils have gone missing in education. As a result, your vigilance and tenacity have proven to work well in safeguarding pupils.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They told me that general behaviour and conduct of others around the school means they are happy and have confidence in staff. On those few occasions when incidents of poor or anti-social behaviour occur, they trust staff and know that this will be dealt with swiftly. The work of staff, in particular the parent family support advisers and counsellor, is instrumental in helping vulnerable pupils to feel supported and make good progress.

Inspection findings

- We agreed four key lines of enquiry for the inspection. The first focused on how well pupils are achieving in mathematics. This is because in key stage 2 national tests in 2017 pupils' progress in mathematics was less than in English. Furthermore, girls did not make the same strong progress as boys. We found that the teaching in mathematics is good. Teachers have high expectations and effective subject knowledge to plan work that is well matched to pupils' needs.
- You have also introduced a scheme to support teachers in planning effective calculation and number work to build pupils' skills and knowledge securely. For example, pupils are gaining a good understanding of place value and apply this well to different operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to solve problems. Teachers' assessments are accurate and used well to intervene when pupils need additional support.
- However, there is too little evidence of the impact that the full range of mathematics, such as measurement, shape, statistics and algebra, has on pupils' mathematical understanding and development. Mathematics is not planned to be taught through other subjects or activities. This limits pupils' ability to use and apply mathematics in a range of contexts to give it meaning. This slows the progress of some pupils, including girls.
- My second key line of enquiry considered how well disadvantaged pupils are doing, including the most able because published data for 2017 shows that they do not make the same rates of progress as other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. The school has a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils which is above the national average. You and the deputy headteacher have a genuine passion to champion the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. You have implemented a robust strategy to check the impact of leaders' and teachers' actions on pupils' learning. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress and are catching up well with their peers.
- However, you acknowledge that some actions, for example checking the progress of the most able disadvantaged pupils, have not been quick enough. As a result, there is still a difference between the attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, especially in the proportions of those reaching the highest standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- We agreed as the third key line of enquiry to examine what leaders are doing successfully to bring about the sustained improvements since 2015, especially in

English. You recognised that improvement in all subjects was needed and set about tackling weaknesses through analysing pupils' progress and increasing accountability through school systems. For example, you ensure that teachers have at least termly face-to-face meetings with leaders about pupils' progress and link improvement priorities through staff appraisal. This has raised awareness of priorities and shared leaders' high expectations with staff so that pupils' progress has rapidly accelerated.

- You have trained other senior and middle leaders effectively to be able to lead improvement in their subjects. Consequently, they have good subject knowledge and use this to check the quality of teaching and learning accurately. They have been instrumental in implementing strategies to raise pupils' achievement. For example, the implementation of a reading strategy is being used well, underpinned by rigorous assessment to get pupils reading quickly when they start in the school. Leaders have also refreshed the school's approach to reading, which is at the heart of pupils' learning and promotes a strong culture for reading.
- You have also revised the school's strategy for writing so that pupils can compose, edit and publish writing as authentic authors for different reasons and in various situations. For example, pupils are confident writers who can convey their thoughts, mood and feeling in narrative work or present facts and information through research in non-fiction.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- develop and improve pupils' mathematical skills and reasoning, especially for girls, through other subjects and a wide range of experiences.
- continue to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils, particularly the most able, to reach the highest standards of which they are capable.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

We agreed the timetable and activities for the inspection. I worked extensively with you including sampling a range of pupils' work and checking this against the school's assessment and tracking system. I scrutinised safeguarding records and we discussed a wide range of related matters, including staff recruitment, training and vetting arrangements. I spoke to pupils, staff and parents about their views of safeguarding. I evaluated evidence that shows how you work with other agencies to keep children safe. Together, we visited classes across the school and also undertook a walk to look at the quality and depth of mathematics across the curriculum. I met with representatives of the governing body and reviewed school documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and records of governors' visits. I took full account of the 35 responses on Parent View as well as other information, including free-texts received through the inspection and spoke separately with parents. I also spoke with pupils throughout inspection activities and during break time.