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Mrs Judith Sword
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sword

Short inspection of St Paul's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 11 July 2017, 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 December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. It is testimony to your calm and purposeful leadership that you have remained focused on raising pupils' achievement and supporting pupils' emotional well-being, despite being without significant senior leadership support for much of the academic year. You and governors have tried unsuccessfully to appoint a substantive deputy headteacher on three occasions, but you are resolute to keep trying until you find the right person for your school. At the same time, your key stage 1 leader has relinquished her post after a prolonged absence. While existing leaders have ably supported you, it is difficult nonetheless.

The strong Christian ethos pervades the school. All staff and governors share your commitment to support pupils' emotional and social development. You recognise that, for many pupils, it is often self-confidence that prevents them from achieving the best they can, so a focus for your work has been to nurture pupils' resilience in learning. In talking to pupils in class and at playtime, it is clear you have had success in this. Pupils are clear that it is OK to get something wrong, but important to 'have a go'. Strong and trusting relationships are evident and pupils are confident that their teachers will help them. You successfully use all available funding towards reducing any differences in learning that may exist, through individual or small group support.

You were rightly concerned about the weaker progress in mathematics made by pupils who took the national assessments in summer 2016 at the end of key stage

2. This was in contrast to the strong progress made by pupils in reading and writing. Leaders' detailed analysis of what happened in the tests highlighted pupils' lack of secure reasoning and problem-solving skills and resulted in well-targeted actions to address the issue. You looked at class organisation and ensured that those pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, who needed targeted support received it. As a result of your actions, there are clear improvements to outcomes in mathematics, particularly at key stage 2. While you acknowledge the improvements made, you recognise that there is still more to do and have already arranged a programme of further support for the forthcoming academic year.

Children in the early years get off to a good start in their learning and make good progress from starting points that are generally below that which is typical in children of their age. The classrooms are vibrant and well resourced, and curriculum activities are planned with children's needs and interests in mind. I particularly wanted to focus on the development of children's early mathematics skills, which I found to be well established and secure. Children in Nursery were confidently singing counting rhymes and were able to recall numbers in ascending and descending order assuredly. Children in Reception class were finding the difference between numbers and using their early reasoning skills to give out exactly the right number of shoes to fit mini-beasts' feet. Such is the quality of teaching that this year almost a third of the Reception class have exceeded the expected level of development in mathematics.

Assessment across the school is accurate, detailed and well supported by evidence from your monitoring. You track the progress of every pupil in the school each term and have a raft of support available for any individual who may be falling behind in their learning. This ensures that pupils make good progress from their starting points. However, you recognise that there is variability between year groups in the proportion of pupils making the faster progress needed to reach the higher standards, particularly in mathematics. This is an area for further improvement, which you acknowledge.

Parents take assurance from your calm leadership. The parents that spoke to the inspector and those that responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, emphasised the caring nature of the school. They said how much they valued the time invested in their children to ensure that they are well cared for and well supported.

Governors are well informed and dedicated to securing the best outcomes for pupils. They have well-established systems in place to monitor the work of the school, and the minutes of their meetings demonstrate the level of challenge given to leaders to improve outcomes. They aim to ensure value for money and that additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is spent wisely to improve outcomes. Governors acknowledge that more detailed targets for improvement, identified in the school development plan, would enable them to evaluate with greater precision.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff undertake regular training to ensure that they are fully aware of school procedures and are kept up to date with the most recent legislation. All staff are included in the update service for the national Disclosure and Barring Service checks. A detailed induction programme and clear code of conduct ensures that all staff understand fully their wider responsibilities for ensuring that pupils are kept safe.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and older pupils, in particular, were able to tell the inspector how they keep themselves safe on the internet and when using social media. They feel that this will help them when they transfer to secondary school. Pupils also shared their understanding of looking after the environment, staying safe when in the community and eating healthily, particularly checking packed lunches to ensure that they are healthy.

All the pupils spoken to said that they feel safe in school, and that there is always a trusted adult in whom they can confide, should they need to.

Overall, school attendance is in line with the national average. However, last year the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was in the lowest 10% of schools nationally. You have a dedicated attendance officer and parent support adviser who collectively analyse individual pupils' attendance. As a result of this careful analysis, you know precisely why every pupil is absent from school. Together, you work hard to minimise the barriers and take prompt action to provide guidance and support for pupils and their families. Consequently, attendance rates are improving well.

Inspection findings

- You have an accurate view of the school's strengths and the areas for further improvement. This is because of the evidence drawn from your monitoring of teaching and the detailed analysis of pupils' outcomes. Consequently, your school development plan reflects the overriding improvements needed, with appropriate actions identified and costed. However, the targets you set are not as precise as they could be to enable leaders and governors to measure fully the intended impact in all year groups.
- Leaders recognised that the school's approach to the teaching of mathematics needed to change. Your analysis indicated that pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills needed to improve, and you invested in appropriate training. While there is evidence of the impact of your actions on pupils' achievement, you recognise that more needs to be done to further embed pupils' skills in this area of mathematical understanding.
- Pupils are secure in their methods for arithmetic. However, their recall of associated mathematical arithmetic facts slows down their rate of work. This

minimises the proportion of pupils able to make the faster rates of progress needed to reach the higher standard.

- In the statutory assessments in 2016, pupils' progress in reading and writing was in the top 10% of schools nationally, which represented strong progress from pupils' generally low starting points. This is underpinned by pupils' secure phonics skills, which support them in reading unfamiliar words and in having the confidence to begin to write.
- Pupils are well behaved and are courteous to each other and to staff. They conduct themselves in an orderly manner both inside the classrooms and around the school. Relationships are strong, because pupils know that they have an adult they can rely on. Pupils are keen to talk about their learning and are encouraged by all staff to work hard and to try new things. This is enabling pupils to develop greater resilience in tackling new concepts and working through problems.
- Leaders use assessment information well to target additional support and organise appropriate interventions for pupils who need it. There is strong evidence of the impact that this is having on accelerating pupils' progress, particularly pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or low achievement. However, you recognise that more needs to be done to secure greater proportions of pupils, particularly the most able and disadvantaged most able, reaching the higher standards.
- As a result of your actions, the overall attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved. Individual case studies demonstrate the extensive support provided to the school by the parent support adviser and the attendance officer. There are clear systems in place for monitoring the attendance of pupils and supporting them to bring their attendance into line.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- improvement planning is strengthened further by identifying precise targets for pupils' achievement at both the expected standard and high standard, and in all year groups
- pupils' skills of reasoning and problem solving in mathematics are further embedded and their skills of recall are improved, so that more pupils can make the faster progress needed to reach the high standard.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

As part of the inspection, I explored the actions taken by leaders to address the slower progress made by pupils in mathematics and to look at how effectively leaders check the rates of progress, particularly of most-able pupils and disadvantaged most-able pupils. I also checked the effectiveness of leaders' actions to improve the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

During the inspection, I met with you and your mathematics subject leader. I also met with several members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and the local authority school improvement partner. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school and I listened to some pupils read. I also held a meeting with a group of pupils from Year 1 to Year 6, to gather their views of the school. I visited classrooms to observe pupils' learning and looked at their work in books. I reviewed information about pupils' progress, attainment and attendance. I scrutinised the school's written self-evaluation and action plans. I also looked at safeguarding arrangements, including evaluating the impact of the school's procedures and policies to keep pupils' safe, safer recruitment checks and record-keeping of children at risk.