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Mrs Kelly Stanesby  
St Leonard's CofE (VA) First School  
Ipstones  
Stoke-on-Trent  
Staffordshire  
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Dear Mrs Stanesby

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Leonard's CofE (VA) First School**

Following my visit to your school on 1 July 2021, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

**Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.**

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- the school website meets statutory requirements
- leaders' action plans clearly set out, in a succinct and manageable manner, what is required to sustain the pace of improvement.

## **Context**

Since the previous section 5 inspection, one teacher and one teaching assistant have left the school. One full-time teacher and a part-time teacher for the early years have been appointed. Last year, four members of the governing body resigned, including the chair of governors. Three new governors have been appointed. The new chair of governors is also the assistant director of education for the Diocese of Lichfield.

For the first part of the spring term, half of all pupils were educated at home. All vulnerable pupils attended school to receive lessons on site. A very small number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities attended part time.

At the time of this inspection, most pupils were not in school but were accessing remote education.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have kept their focus and efforts on the key priorities identified in the previous section 5 inspection report. They are taking the right actions to move improvement from a 'tiny spark to a bright flame'. They know what needs to happen next to sustain momentum. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans are detailed and thorough and have supported leaders' improvements thus far. However, the depth and detail mean that you spend a lot of time in breaking them down into meaningful documents for staff to understand and work from.

In this small school, many demands are placed on the headteacher, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, yet you have made sure that you continue to focus on actions that will improve outcomes for pupils. You value the expertise that external support has provided. You state that this has been helpful in recruiting and developing staff, and it has strengthened your leadership. Staff enjoy working at the school and those who responded to Ofsted's survey say that it is improving. They also report that the school is well led and managed.

The new governors have got to grips with what is working well and what the school needs to do next. They are already making a positive difference in helping you to manage workload and keeping school improvement focused on the right things. Governors are in the process of tightening up systems across the range of their roles and responsibilities, including safeguarding and monitoring the quality of education. However, the implementation and impact of their actions remain at an early stage and are not yet embedded. They know that they need succinct information at the right time to make sure that improvements continue.

Leaders have strengthened safeguarding training for all staff and governors. Staff are clear about procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders use regular audits and quizzes to check staff knowledge and understanding. They provide additional

training based on the findings of these checks. Staff spoke highly of the 'Prevent' training they had completed. They gave several specific examples of how their own knowledge had improved. You have worked with schools in the local area to support your own professional development.

You have put time, thought and effort into organising the teaching of early reading. All staff know how to teach phonics. In Reception and key stage 1, reading books now match the sounds pupils need to know. Books for pupils in key stage 2 have also been improved. Across the school, staff regularly assess what pupils know and can do, and this is lifting expectations for all.

The school's reading areas are attractive, with a wide variety of engaging books. Children in Reception can often be found curled up with a book in their reading area. Welcoming reading areas in each class and a designated library area all help to promote reading for pleasure across the school.

Leaders have improved curriculum plans for English, which now support teachers to plan sequences of lessons that build knowledge over time. These improvements are helping pupils to get better at writing and to have more confidence in what they know and can do. Following the full return to school in March 2021, in-school assessments showed that pupils were struggling to write at length. In response, staff focused on specific aspects, such as getting pupils to write short sentences accurately. This has brought benefits and pupils are now writing with more care across a range of genres.

Indeed, pupils' writing in English shows that they are using what they know. In all classes, expectations have risen. Leaders are now considering how pupils will extend and develop their writing in different subjects. As yet, this work is at an early stage.

Staff show pride in the improvements made so far. The school environment now reflects an exciting curriculum that increasingly builds pupils' knowledge over time and celebrates their achievements. However, the school website does not yet reflect the full curriculum offer and does not meet statutory requirements.

You recognise that engaging contexts, local visits and use of the local environment are not enough on their own to help pupils know more and remember more. You have developed sequences of learning that show the smaller steps needed in different subjects. These are written to match the needs of mixed-age classes and the context of St Leonard's School. These plans are ready for implementation in September 2021.

You and the staff have overhauled the early years learning environment, both indoors and outdoors. Currently, Reception children are taught in a class of their own. Leaders chose to be an early adopter school for the revised statutory

framework for the early years foundation stage. As a result, they are well informed about the latest developments.

On the day of inspection, no children were present in the Reception classroom. Nevertheless, the indoor and outdoor environments were well structured, promoted all areas of learning, and presented a positive picture of everyday life in Reception.

Evidence of children's learning in the early years shows that they read, write, use mathematics, create, and make sense of their place in the world in a variety of meaningful ways. For example, a video of children organising themselves being physical showed that they can collaborate, cooperate, explain and reason, move safely and record mathematical tallies. Staff in Reception say that they have learned the importance of knowing when to support and when to stand back and let children use what they know to do things independently.

### **Additional support**

The local authority facilitated support for the school following the last Ofsted inspection, and has subsequently monitored its impact. The school received additional support for improving pupils' writing during the summer term 2021. The local authority also supported the school to secure new members of the governing body.

You value both the advisory support commissioned from external consultants and from a national leader of education. Staff have received tailored input and feedback. You believe that this support has helped to raise expectations and improve staff subject knowledge. It has also improved your checks on the quality of education and confidence in leading the school to improve.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, staff, two governors, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I looked at several documents, including the school's own evaluation of its work, school improvement plans, minutes of governors' meetings and reports from external advisers. I watched videos of pupils reading.

I examined the single central record of staff recruitment checks, scrutinised the school's website, and considered the responses to Ofsted's parents' and staff surveys.

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 reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Foulkes  
**Ofsted Inspector**