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Andy Richbell
Headteacher
St Nicolas's CofE Junior School
Locks Hill
Brighton
BN41 2LA

Dear Mr Richbell

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Nicolas's CofE Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy head, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority, and pupils from Years 5 and 6. The school improvement plans were evaluated. These include an assessment of current practice and suggestions for improvement by teaching and support staff and an action plan circulated to parents and carers.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, the committee structure of the governing body has been reorganised to avoid duplication, clarify areas of responsibility and support planning and monitoring. Curriculum changes have been introduced to extend cross-curricular links, enable mixed-age or cross-year teaching groups where appropriate and to encourage independent learning. Subject groups have been established to extend opportunities for teachers beyond the senior leadership team to take greater

responsibility for teaching and learning and curriculum development. Plans for the school to become an all-through primary have been advanced by appointment of an Early Years Foundation Stage specialist.

Main findings

Your action plan is practical, with clear lines of accountability, manageable dates set for meeting targets and, in most cases, precise explanations of how success will be measured and progress monitored, particularly in English and mathematics. The version circulated to parents and carers offers a sound basis for school-home partnership. Rightly, your focus is on establishing consistency of good practice, particularly in teachers' use of information about pupils' levels of attainment and rates of progress when planning lessons and setting targets. Currently: able pupils are not always fully challenged; boys do less well than girls in all aspects of English; and pupils on the school action plus programme progress relatively slowly. A programme of whole-staff training and individual support is being put in place. Curriculum planning shows a greater emphasis on reading and writing, using texts of high quality as models and putting literacy skills into 'real life' contexts to demonstrate their relevance.

Governors have responded positively to the section 5 findings. The new committee structure reflects a strategic and practical approach to school improvement, with each of the two main committees having a clearly-defined remit, and provision made for unplanned demands. A helpful distinction is made between action that requires governors to meet and action that can be productively undertaken between meetings. Governors recognise the need to strengthen their ability to hold the school to account through rigorous interrogation of information about pupils' achievement and the quality and impact of teaching. They are pursuing training opportunities.

In summary, senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- strengthen the capacity of governors to act as effective 'critical friends'
- develop and embed consistency of good practice in teaching through
 - a shared understanding of what constitutes good or better teaching
 - more secure and accurate assessment of pupils' standards and progress, both in lessons and in the marking of work
 - constructive use, in planning lessons, of information about pupils' knowledge and skills, so that pupils of all abilities and learning styles are challenged and their progress accelerated.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

As you and your governors acknowledge, the local authority is providing well-targeted and effective support, principally through organising: opportunities to learn from good practice in local schools; coaching and consultancy by teaching and learning advisors; monitoring of progress; and participation in senior staff appointments. The diocese is less proactive but steadily supportive.

To strengthen the implementation of the school's action plan, the likely pattern of further Ofsted intervention will include:

- lesson observations and feedback to teachers
- contribution to staff training, with a particular focus on matching expectations and activities to pupils' differing abilities and ways of learning
- work with governors to ensure that they set challenging targets for senior leaders and teachers, based on accurate analysis of information about progress made by all pupils, including pupils eligible for additional government funding through the Pupil Premium.

Where appropriate, this support will be organised jointly with other schools.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Brighton and Hove.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector