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Mark Michalkiewicz
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Dear Mr Michalkiewicz

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Elizabeth's School

Following my visit to your school on 01 February 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 acting principal, members of the school leadership and management teams, and the Governing Body. The school improvement plans were evaluated. Brief visits were made to eight lessons.

Context

There have been no significant staff changes since the Section 5 inspection. While there has been further exploration of how to fill the vacant principal post there is no clear resolution in the immediate future. A further senior post also remains temporarily vacant due to illness.

Main findings

There has been significant development in the procedure for monitoring the quality of teaching. There will now be unannounced lesson observations, within declared two week observation windows.

In addition, plans are in place for subject leaders to drop-in to see how well aspects of the curriculum are being taught across all lessons, for example communication and literacy skills.

Targets have been set for pupils' progress in English, mathematics, religious education and information and communication technology (ICT). These targets are based appropriately on upper quartile expectations from the Progression Guidance 2010. This target setting approach is supported by the school's use of an additional commercial available target setting tool.

Case studies are being developed to explain why a few pupils with particularly complex health needs, including degenerative conditions, are making less than that expected progress given their age and starting point.

Moderation of pupils' attainment is carried out by discussions that involve all teachers. However moderation does not take place with other schools to ensure its accuracy.

Tracking of each pupil's progress towards their targets is beginning to provide information that can be analysed in more detail, for example at subject, class and whole school levels. The interpretation of these analyses together with information provided from monitoring of the quality of teaching has not yet taken place.

More detailed collection of information about pupils' behaviour is being recorded on a computer based system. Further training on the use of the data to improve behaviour management and learning is being provided at the end of the spring term.

Lessons visited during the monitoring visit showed the following good features:

- Clear, appropriately differentiated learning objectives
- Good questioning to establish what pupils understand and where further teaching was required
- Good, practical demonstration of skills to be learned
- Effective staff team work.

The following aspects required improvement:

- The effective use of teaching assistants to maximise pupils' opportunities to learn and be independent.
- Missed opportunities to develop communication skills, especially for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Plans do not focus clearly enough on the intended impact of the actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and increase pupils' learning. It is therefore not possible to evaluate adequately how effective these actions have been.

The continuing senior staff shortage substantially limits the capacity to monitor the effectiveness of the improvement actions. While substantial time is spent training staff too little is then available to ensure the training is implemented effectively and consistently.

There are not yet plans for undertaking an external review of governance. Governors do not yet have sufficient information about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching to monitor if improvements are being made.

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, HMI recommend that further action is taken as soon as possible:

- Improve action plans to include clear expectations about the intended impact on improving the quality of teaching and increasing pupils' progress.
- Analyse whole-school information about pupils' progress and use this to monitor the effectiveness of improvement actions and identify any further areas for development.
- Implement the improved procedures for monitoring teaching, including the effectiveness of the teaching of communication, literacy and numeracy in all lessons.
- Establish links with other schools to moderate teacher assessment to ensure its accuracy.
- Make arrangements for an external review of governance.

HMI will provide information regarding links with other special schools and the external review of governance. A further visit will be made to monitor the effectiveness of actions to increase the rate of improvement.

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

External support

There is insufficient external support. The lack of this support since the inspection, together with the significant shortage of senior management time due to a vacancy and long term illness, has limited the progress made in bringing about improvements. It is recommended that the school strengthens links with other special schools to improve moderation of pupils' attainments and improve the professional networking that such links can provide. The governors should, as soon as possible, undertake an external review of governance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Charlie Henry
Her Majesty's Inspector