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Mr Richard Camp
Headteacher
Towcester Church of England Primary School
Islington Road
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Dear Mr Camp

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Towcester Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 on 7-8 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, three members of the governing body including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a school improvement officer from the local authority. The school improvement and development plans were evaluated. A tour of the school was undertaken with the headteacher and pupils' work in books was sampled. The management of the performance of staff in raising progress and achievement was discussed.

Context

There have been no significant contextual changes within the school since the section 5 inspection which judged the school to require improvement. There has been one new member join the governing body.

Main findings

Work undertaken to improve the school is focussed and appropriately prioritised. Staff and members of the Governing Body have worked well as a team. They are

determined to strengthen the school and ensure the education which each pupil receives is as good as it can be in every class. School leaders are supporting staff well and are working hard to develop a more consistent approach to teaching, including lesson planning. Opportunities are being provided for staff to work with colleagues in other good and outstanding schools, so that current practice can be evaluated and changed. School leaders have set performance targets for all staff, although sometimes the whole school targets for teaching staff are not challenging enough. They are based on the average progress to be made by all pupils and don't include the need to narrow the gap between those pupils who have much ground to make up and all pupils. Some personal targets for staff lack sufficient detail and clarity, to ensure that actions can be adequately followed through and that all aspects of the school's work are monitored thoroughly. There are plans to make this more rigorous from the start of the next academic year and to ensure individual targets are better linked to the school improvement plan.

Governors are clear about the school's priorities for improvement, where standards must improve and their role in monitoring the progress and achievement of all pupils, including those who have the potential to achieve higher grades. There is a good understanding of their responsibilities and how the organisation of their monitoring fits into the whole school monitoring of the points for improvement raised at the last inspection. There are still inconsistencies in the progress of pupils in each class and the school handwriting and marking policies are not being consistently followed. School subject policies have not been sufficiently adapted to plan for progression across each year group and there has not been sufficient checking that all opportunities for reinforcing reading, writing and mathematics are taken across a range of subject areas. New methods of staff supporting each other in planning and teaching are beginning to address this. The school is not complacent. It has identified the necessity to further improve the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by improving the quality of the outdoor activities. It has also worked hard to better meet the needs of more able pupils and to ensure they are sufficiently challenged through lessons and through homework. Further training is required for staff, particularly in the training for the special educational needs co-ordinator, and for governors, particularly in understanding school performance data.

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 recommends that further action is taken to:

- set targets for staff which are ambitious and based closely on the targets identified on the school improvement plan
- monitor lesson planning more closely to ensure that it follows robust school subject policies and allows for sufficient progression across year groups and topics

- ensure that marking, particularly in mathematics, identifies where concepts have not been understood, gives sufficient pointers for improvement and allows pupils time to correct their work before moving on
- ensure the quality of teaching is as good as it can be in all subjects, including the sessions for the sounds that letters make (phonics) and that staff are adequately trained for the roles they are assigned to
- schedule another visit to the school by HMI to monitor progress, particularly in the adequacy of school policies to ensure sufficient pupil progression and in the planning for the full range of pupils' needs.

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

External support

The school is drawing effectively on a range of external support. Staff and governors are taking up development opportunities provided through the local authority and the Diocese. They are also making good use of other local schools to improve their own teaching practice. This is helping staff to recognise good and outstanding practice and to work more confidently. The local authority has provided useful support in reviewing school improvement documentation and action plans.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Diocese and the Director of Children's Services for Northamptonshire.

Yours sincerely

Jane Melbourne
Her Majesty's Inspector