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Ashley Scott
St Mary and St John CofE VA Primary School
Church Street
North Luffenham
Oakham
LE15 8JR

Dear Mr Scott

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Mary and St John CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 headteacher, other senior leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school action plan was evaluated. A tour of the school was undertaken and an informal discussion was held with a small group of pupils.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2012, one temporary teacher has left the school and another teacher was due to leave on the day of this visit. A partnership has been arranged with a local outstanding school, Whissendine Primary School. The governing body has advertised the vacancy for a permanent headteacher and is due to interview candidates on Monday 25 February 2013.

Main findings

The governing body was aware of most of the issues raised in the inspection report in November 2012, and had already taken decisive action in initiating a change in the senior leadership of the school. Following the inspection, a sharp and clearly prioritised action plan was prepared by the acting headteacher and the school improvement adviser. This has provided a firm framework on which subject and key stage coordinators have been able to prepare specific improvement plans. There is now a strong sense of shared purpose among the staff. Middle leaders describe the action plan as bringing both direction and stability to the relatively new staff team, empowering teachers to take responsibility for their areas.

An effective programme of observation, linked to professional development has taken place and there is evidence that this, combined with a much greater stability in staffing, is bringing about improvements in teaching and learning across the school.

Some very specific progress has been made on the key issue of raising attainment in writing. All children have been provided with common approaches to better writing through VCOP (Vocabulary, Connectives, Openers, Punctuation). As a result, pupils report that they are now writing more regularly and with greater challenge. Good progress has been made in helping pupils to understand how to improve their work and make progress, particularly in literacy. As yet, the school has not provided good information and guidance to parents about how to support their children's progress. Although the school has good internal tracking systems for monitoring the progress of all pupils, parents and pupils do not yet have effective ways to understand how well pupils are doing in relation to their starting points.

There has been a lack of agreement between the local authority and the governing body about the process of appointing a new headteacher and the strategic planning for the future of the school. Whilst the local authority has favoured a solution which would link this school with one or more other local schools, the governing body has been keen to establish independent stable senior leadership as soon as possible.

Senior leaders and governors are taking 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:

- resolve the long-term leadership and strategic direction for the school as soon as possible
- ensure that stable mentoring and support programmes are in place for all senior leaders as they gain experience in their new roles
- develop a greater focus on the individual progress of pupils, so that parents and pupils can quickly understand how well they are doing and so that teachers can plan for the full range of ability and potential in each class.

PROTECT-INSPECTION



HMI will offer additional support by arranging for a day in the summer term of 2013 for an evaluation of progress. If possible this will be conducted jointly with the acting headteacher and the headteacher designate. This will provide an opportunity to consider the timing of the school's next inspection.

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

External support

The local authority was initially slow to act on concerns rightly raised as early as 2011 by the governing body about the leadership of the school. Since the summer of 2012, however, some helpful targeted assistance has been given to the governing body supporting a change in senior leadership. Local authority officers have also provided some very useful, subject-specific and phase-specific support to middle leaders. Members of the governing body do not believe that they have had the strategic case for federation or academy status sufficiently well justified to them. The school improvement adviser has been very supportive in helping to prepare the school's action plan following the inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector