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Mr Ian Moss
Headteacher
St Thomas' CofE Primary School
Parkgate Road
Stockton Heath
Warrington
Cheshire
WA4 2AP

Dear Mr Moss

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to St Thomas' CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself, senior leaders and managers, six members of the governing body, a local authority officer and a representative from Chester Diocese. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Minutes from governing body meetings and the school's monitoring records were also considered. I also visited each classroom to meet pupils and staff.

Context

Two teachers are on long term absence. These classes are being taught by temporary teachers. There is likely to be further staff changes at the end of the academic year. Plans are in place to appoint a new Early Years Foundation Stage leader for September.

Main findings

A shared determination to become a good school and an honest acceptance of key weaknesses mean senior leaders are driving forward necessary change with vigour. Fruitful action prior to the recent inspection means the school was already on the right path to becoming more effective. Management systems are firmly in place and key leaders have a good grasp of their roles and responsibilities. Consequently, the school has firm foundations to underpin their future success. Inspection findings are being used as a helpful marker to take stock of previous actions and to set goals for the future.

Senior leaders know the school well so time and energy is spent on the correct priorities. Despite considerable staff absence, no time has been lost since the inspection and the pace of change is gaining momentum. Senior leader, including governors, are not shying away from difficult decisions. There is a culture of 'no excuses' and a determination to overcome any barriers that hamper the school's progress.

The road to success is underpinned by effective action plans which show senior leaders know what they need to do to tackle key shortcomings. Improving teaching and the quality of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage are at the forefront of the school's actions. Whole-school training, individual support and coaching plus opportunities to visit other schools are beginning to bear fruit. Frequent checks on teaching are making a difference because teachers receive expert feedback to help them improve their practice. Effective support is in place for teachers who need extra help to improve their teaching. Individual plans and sharp targets reflect the school's ambition for all teaching to be good so pupils can reach their full potential. Senior leaders are exploiting opportunities to restructure roles and responsibilities to ensure there is strong leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Senior leaders have the support and commitment of the governing body who accept the inspection judgements are accurate but are in no doubt that the school is on its way to becoming good. They have an increasing understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because of the comprehensive information they receive from the headteacher. Nonetheless, they are in the early stages of gaining first-hand evidence to help them gather a sharper view of the progress the school is making against the planned actions.

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:

- develop opportunities for members of the governing body to gather first-hand evidence to help them gain an independent view of the school's progress to becoming good.

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

External support

The local authority and Diocese are working in partnership to ensure the support they provide is cohesive and does not lead to mixed messages which could hamper success. The school is making good use of this effective support. Timely meetings between a local authority officer and a Diocesan representative are helping senior leaders reflect on their actions and tackle the barriers to success. Advice and guidance from local authority consultants has led to a more fit-for-purpose environment and a stronger system to assess children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school are exploiting partnerships with a teacher training institution to harness Early Years Foundation Stage expertise to support their drive in improving this area of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector