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10 May 2013

Remus Sawyerr
Headteacher
Shefford Church of England Primary School
Wantage Road
Hungerford
RG17 7DB

Dear Mr Sawyerr

Monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to a school requiring improvement

Following my visit to your school and Chaddleworth St Andrew's Church of England Primary School on 8 May 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 federated schools.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the schools were judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspections in January 2013.

Evidence

During my visit I met with the chair and three other members of the governing body, had a discussion with your local authority school improvement adviser and looked at plans and records, including the post-Ofsted action plan. I appreciate the time you gave to discussions with me and our walk around both schools to visit each classroom. Thank you too for making arrangements to release your assistant headteacher and other staff from teaching so that I could meet with them.

Context

Following a period of considerable turnover of staff prior to the recent inspection there have been no significant changes since, although there will be another change of assistant headteacher in September. Two parents have recently joined the governing body.

Main findings

Your action plan, which was initially based on accurate self-evaluation prior to the recent inspection, is clear that what the schools need to do is improve the quality of teaching and the rate at which pupils make progress, particularly in writing and mathematics. Staff and governors I spoke to were in no doubt what the schools' priorities or overarching targets are because they have either been involved in planning or you have shared it with them in some detail. The plan is not clear enough though about the difference you expect to make to pupils' learning or the quality of teaching at key points along the way. This makes it difficult to track progress. The governing body's role in monitoring and evaluation is not explicit enough.

You have updated your original improvement plan to take account of specific points made in the inspection reports. Many of the key activities remain the same and had already started. This puts you, your staff and governors in a good position to tackle what needs to be done. At the core of your work to improve teaching is the way you work alongside staff to plan, teach and review lessons, and you and your assistant headteacher coach individual teachers. There is evidence that this, particularly the coaching, has improved teaching since September and that it is having a knock-on effect on pupils' progress over time. As you rightly identify in your plan you must not lose momentum in this work. There are some gaps in records which suggest that support may not always have been as focused or frequent since the inspection. Not all staff have had the opportunity to benefit from this kind of support.

The governing body uses your termly data analysis to keep a check on the progress pupils are making across the schools at its Standards Committee. Separately, governors receive an update on the quality of teaching at full governing body meetings, based on the most recent formal classroom observations. This may be several weeks out of date at that point. It does not necessarily give an accurate picture of the quality of teaching over time because it is not linked with pupils' progress and other evidence such as work in their books.

You have ensured that all recommendations made at the recent inspections are being addressed, even where they were not covered by your original plan. For example, you are monitoring attendance data more rigorously although this is yet to show any real impact. Very recently you gave other staff specific short term projects to develop their leadership roles. The teachers involved are keen and rising to the challenge as best they can, but they have not had sufficient guidance or support to channel their energies effectively.

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

- review the post-Ofsted action plan to be clearer what you expect the impact to be on pupils' achievement in writing and mathematics, and how well they can apply their skills at each step along the way. Ensure it is clear how and when governors will evaluate impact.
- review plans to develop the leadership roles of other staff. What they are asked to do should link closely with existing activities so that they support you and your assistant headteacher rather than creating additional work. Ensure that you are clear how they will be supported in their development.

I will continue to monitor the schools until their next section 5 inspections. I will also follow up opportunities for school staff to attend English and mathematics conferences provided by Ofsted.

External support

You and your governors benefitted from well-focused advice and support from the local authority in the 18 months prior to the recent inspection. School improvement advisers worked alongside you to confirm that you are making accurate judgements about the quality of teaching in lessons. They supported you in developing pupil progress meetings through which you are challenging staff and identifying what they need to do to help individual pupils. More recently, the local authority has rightly reduced its direct support and is focusing on regular review meetings to hold you and your governors to account for the progress of the schools. The additional support they will provide as part of their new programme for improving schools, and links with good and outstanding local schools, should provide opportunities to learn from good practice elsewhere.

I am copying this letter to the local authority, the diocese and the chair of the governing body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector