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Mrs Yvonne Barns
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England (Aided) Primary School
The Green
Chipping Norton
OX7 5DH

Dear Yvonne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 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 school following the section 5 inspection in February 2013. The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and we walked around each classroom, talking to pupils and looking at work in pupils' books. I also met with your senior leadership team, a representative from the local authority and four governors. I evaluated your school improvement plan and considered pupils' progress data since the last inspection.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Your data shows that pupils are making better progress. You have identified where weaker teaching leads to slower progress and your data shows that this progress is accelerating. There is still more to do to ensure that no groups of pupils are left behind. Historically, pupils eligible for pupil premium funding are a group that have performed less well than their peers, particularly in mathematics. I am not convinced

that you are monitoring this group carefully enough. It is important that pupil premium spending is rigorously monitored to ensure this small group of pupils make accelerated progress and catches up with their peers. I was encouraged by the conversation I had with you and your senior leadership team as you clearly recognised the moral imperative to ensure this funding makes a difference.

I know that you were disappointed with some of the teaching that we saw. You were able to talk accurately about the reasons why this teaching was less effective than what you believe to be typical. I know you shared my concern about the quality and focus of some of the small group sessions we saw. I could not see the purpose behind some of these sessions and the adults leading these need further training. I am pleased to hear that you have plans to introduce new programmes and training in September. It is essential that additional small group work is used to target pupils very specifically so they catch up quickly and spend a little time away from their regular class as possible. In some cases, work in pupils' books indicated that some pupils had been regularly attending intervention groups all academic year and making little progress in them.

You intend to train all staff in the use of phonics for teaching reading and spelling. I know that you have been pleased with the success of phonics teaching in Key Stage 1 and Early Years Foundation Stage. This additional training will be particularly helpful for lower attaining readers in Key Stage 2. It will be important that you monitor how well all teachers and teaching assistants are teaching the sounds that letters make to help pupils become more proficient spellers and readers.

The local authority has provided training mathematics teaching. This has been focused on developing pupils' conceptual understanding and using success criteria to help pupils understand the procedure that they must follow. Observations today showed that teachers are experimenting with these methods but remain too focused on pupils getting the right answer rather than developing a full understanding of the concept being studied. Too often, pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to explain their thinking because the adults who support them are solely focused on helping pupils complete the task. I know that you have purchased a range of equipment to help pupils explore number in a structured way. It will be important that all adults receive further training and support so these resources are used to help pupils understand how the number system works.

Your action plan is comprehensive but a little muddled. It is not immediately clear what actions belong to what aim. When we discussed this, you were able to show the connections between actions and aims, but acknowledge that it could be a lot clearer. It will be helpful to governors and teachers to present your plans in an easier to read format. It is important that teachers and governors understand what needs to happen and how aspects will be monitored.

Some of your governors are feeling bruised by the previous inspection, and the subsequent pressure they feel to improve. Governors are starting to use data to

understand how different groups are progressing. They are anxious to know how they should develop their monitoring in a way that remains sensitive to the professionalism of teachers. You have arranged for the local authority to conduct the review of governance but they are yet to set a date for this. It is imperative that this happens soon so that the governing body can plan training and development based on the findings of this independent audit.

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, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- improve the quality of intervention and adult support so that it helps pupils catch up
- simplify the action plans so they are easily understood with clear milestones showing the school's journey to being good
- ensure governors receive the findings of the review of governance before the end of this academic year.

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

External support

The local authority has impressed on the school the importance of improving quickly. A consultant is attached to the school to monitor improvements and act as a broker for support. The local authority identified this school as one requiring additional support before the inspection. Reports produced by the local authority are accurate and helpful in pointing out where strengths and weaknesses exist. A numeracy consultant is working with the school in developing the quality of teaching in mathematics. The local authority is providing training and support for a programme to help pupils catch up in mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire and the Diocese of Oxford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mike Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector