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Mrs Marion Link
Swaffham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School
White Cross Road
Swaffham
Norfolk
PE37 7RF

Dear Mrs Link

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Swaffham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 6 June 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the assistant headteacher, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the school's intervention adviser from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

At the beginning of this term, the senior teacher was appointed as assistant headteacher. Three new teachers have been appointed for September. This is to cover a planned period of absence, to replace a teacher who will retire and for an additional class to accommodate the increased number of pupils on roll.

Main findings

You wasted no time in adapting existing plans to reflect the findings of the inspection. As a result, the work that had already started has gained momentum. The recent lesson observations and assessments indicate that teaching has improved and that increasing proportions of pupils reach or exceed age-appropriate standards. The action plan identifies a strong commitment to training staff in the things that need to improve. This training, together with focusing staff meetings on improving teaching, makes sure that staff know what they need to do and can develop the skills needed. In addition, the appointment of an assistant headteacher sensibly allows you to share the load for modelling good practice and for checking that agreed actions take place. As a result, reading and spelling are now taught and assessed systematically and regularly, for example.

The lesson observations that you have undertaken since the inspection and the informal monitoring by the assistant headteacher focus well on identifying areas for development, quickly providing opportunities to improve practice and then setting the purpose for subsequent observations. You place high importance on working collaboratively with staff to discuss and agree improvements, but this is not a soft option because you set high expectations and leave no room for complacency or underperformance. You recognise that there is considerable work to do to make sure that teaching is good and that pupils achieve well. However, you are mindful that improvements need to be well-established and so the action plan sensibly provides staff with a clear way forward to cover all that is needed without doing too much too soon.

The action plan sets suitably ambitious targets for pupils' progress. A range of checks by senior leaders allows for judgements to be tested out in a variety of ways, including collaboration with other schools to check the accuracy of assessments. In addition to the broad targets for pupils' achievement, the plan will benefit from more-specific targets to show exactly what aspects of pupils' achievement need to improve.

I agree with you that in order to maintain momentum towards good leadership of teaching, subject leaders need to play a fuller role in school improvement. The systematic way that the action plan focuses on improving things that apply across all subjects sets the scene well for subject leaders to make a greater contribution.

Since the inspection, you and the assistant headteacher have taken further action to develop staff's understanding and use of assessment, especially in lesson plans and when checking on how well pupils are doing in each lesson. As a result, you are seeing better planning for different groups of pupils within each class and teachers adapting lessons more appropriately as pupils work through the planned activities.

Minutes from the second meeting of the Curriculum and School Improvement Committee shows that the governing body now looks more specifically at pupils' performance. This helps governors to ask more searching questions of the evidence presented to them, but governors are not yet using their visits to gather enough information for themselves. Since the inspection, the governing body has made sure that it is better-informed about how pupil premium funding is used and will look at how effective this is in the near future.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the action plan by including targets that show exactly what aspects of pupils' achievement need to improve
- make sure that governors gain sufficient first-hand information on the quality of teaching and pupils' performance by setting a clear plan for checking the actions taken by staff
- develop the roles and responsibilities of subject leaders so that they play a full part in leading and checking improvements.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school's intervention adviser provides an appropriate level of support and you value the challenge that this provides. You also make good use of other opportunities for challenge, such as those from colleagues in other schools and including the Local Leader of Education that you are linked with.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector