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Mr K Harvey
Headteacher
St Nicolas Church of England Junior School
Link Road
Newbury
RG14 7LU

Dear Mr Harvey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Nicolas C.E. Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 12 September 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking incisive and urgent action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- draw up a development plan that sets clear long-term and short-term targets for pupils' attainment and progress in each year group so that school leaders and the governing body can judge how quickly the school is improving.
- ensure that school leaders take full account of the progress that pupils make over time when judging the overall quality of teaching in the school.
- increase the rigour of the checks made on the quality of teaching.

The local authority should:

- provide intensive training and support to the governing body so that governors can fulfil their role in holding school leaders to account for the achievement of pupils
- set up links with a local outstanding junior or primary school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the three assistant headteachers and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with five members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils. I looked at records of the checks made on teaching this year and last year.

Main findings

School leaders are keen to improve the school and have begun to take action to address the areas for improvement from the inspection. They have drawn up an action plan for the academic year that is focused on improving the quality of teaching. The current plan does not state clearly what impact the actions will have on improving the achievement of pupils. For example, there are no specific short-term or long-term targets set for pupils' attainment. This means that it will be difficult for school leaders and the governing body to judge whether the strategies they have introduced to improve teaching are making a difference to outcomes for pupils.

Checks on the quality of teaching are still not rigorous enough. Teachers do not get enough guidance on what they need to do to improve. School leaders carry out a range of monitoring activities, but rely too heavily on evidence from lesson observations to judge the quality of teaching. They have not triangulated this information with other evidence from the scrutiny of pupils' books and the data on pupils' progress. As a result, school leaders and governors have an overgenerous view of the amount of consistently good teaching in the school.

The committee structure governing body is being modified to include a curriculum and standards committee. This committee will scrutinise information on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The Chair of the Governing Body acknowledges that governors need further support to develop their role in monitoring the work of the school so that they can challenge school leaders effectively.

HMI will carry out a further monitoring visit at the end of the autumn term.

External support

The local authority has intensified its support for the school following the section 5 inspection. The school has joined the 'Intensifying Support Programme' (ISP) run by

the local authority. A school improvement adviser will shortly be visiting the school to draw up a raising attainment plan (RAP) for this term. Participation in this programme will also enable the school to access additional support from other officers of the local authority.

The local authority recently supported the governing body with a review of the quality of its work and there are plans for additional training and support for governors over the coming year.

The school is developing good links with its 'feeder' infant school that are helping to improve transition between the schools and ensure that pupils do not lose ground when they join the school in Year 3.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Oxford.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles

Her Majesty's Inspector