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Mrs Harrie Macarte
Headteacher
Saint James' Church of England Primary School
Moorgreen Road
West End
Southampton
Hampshire
SO30 3EG

Dear Mrs Macarte

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Saint James' Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- specify targets that can be checked during the year for how well pupils' progress and the quality of teaching are improving
- make full use of the information from the assessments at the end of Reception to set challenging targets for pupils in Years 1 and 2
- check regularly the proportions of pupils in each class who are making good progress as well as the progress of different groups of pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other leaders and governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited some English lessons with you and some mathematics lessons with the subject leader. I held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. The action plan was evaluated.

Context

Several teachers left the school at the end of last term. Nine teachers have left the school since the section 5 inspection. Four newly-qualified teachers started in September 2013.

Main findings

You and your governors have concentrated on improving teaching since the inspection. A common theme during my visit was a sense of frustration that not all staff, last term, were fully behind the need for change. This had held back improvements and taken up a lot of leadership time. In my discussions, all agreed that the atmosphere in the school was now very different and that staff were working successfully as a team in the drive to move the school to good.

You are right to monitor the quality of teaching this month to provide a baseline from which you can gauge future improvement. You have set the expectation that pupils will make good progress this year and you have tightened up your approach to checking pupils' progress. You are relying too much, however, on the average progress made by pupils in each class rather than being more diagnostic about how well different groups are doing. You are not making full use of the information from the assessments at the end of the Reception year to set challenging targets for progress in Years 1 and 2.

The action plan covers what needs to be improved. However, its length and detail make it hard for teachers and governors to extract the essential action points and identify what they need to do themselves to make sure the plan succeeds. The plan has end-of-year targets but lacks interim ones for the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. This makes it hard for you, your staff and governors to check, as the year progresses, that plans are working and for you to make any necessary changes.

Governors continue to provide helpful challenge for you and your staff. Given the detail in the action plan, the Chair of Governors has produced a summary document specifically for governors, which is succinct and helpful. It focuses on the key points and sets a clear expectation that governors will evaluate regularly the impact of any developments.

With the support of consultants from the local authority, you are setting up training opportunities for your English and mathematics leaders. The plans to provide training for these leaders in scrutinising pupils' work, observing lessons and discussing work with pupils are appropriate.

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 local authority has been providing support for the school for some time and this has continued since the section 5 inspection. Support is being targeted appropriately at the areas the school needs to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector