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Sue Todd
Headteacher
St Matthew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Ipswich
Portman Road
Ipswich
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Dear Mrs Todd

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Matthew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Ipswich

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 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 June 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:

- accelerate the progress of Year 5 pupils in reading, writing and mathematics and the progress of Year 6 pupils in writing
- incorporate into the school improvement plan more detail of the strategies that are intended to secure the intended improvements
- bring forward plans to develop teacher peer-support strategies such as 'lesson study' or 'learning triads' to involve all staff in the improving the quality of teaching
- build leadership capacity by expanding the role of subject leaders and making it clear in the improvement plan who leads on each aspect
- ensure that lesson observations always report on the progress of different ability groups and that feedback to teachers includes subject-specific detail
- provide a clear breakdown of the impact of different factors on attendance
- take up the local authority's offer to conduct a review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership may be improved further.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and representative of the local authority and the diocese, to discuss the action taken since the inspection. The school improvement plan and the action plan you developed following the inspection were evaluated. Brief visits were made to several classrooms to see pupils at work. The school's systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' progress were reviewed.

Context

Since the school was judged to require improvement in June 2013, the two acting deputy headteachers have had their promotions confirmed. Two newly-qualified teachers and a new foundation governor have been appointed. Two teachers left at the end of the summer term 2013 and two others have reduced their teaching loads. Representatives of the school have attended an Ofsted 'Getting to Good' seminar.

Main findings

In the 2013 national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils made the expected progress in writing and mathematics, but a below average proportion did so in reading. Few pupils made more than expected progress in mathematics. Pupils currently in Years 5 and 6 have made slower than expected progress since they left Year 2, especially in writing.

Since the inspection in June 2013, you have sharpened the school's monitoring procedures. Senior leaders make checks every week. They use a wide range of information to evaluate the quality of teaching, bringing together information from lesson observations, pupils' assessment records, scrutiny of lesson plans and checks on pupils' work. Teachers now get prompt feedback and any issues that are identified are addressed as a matter of urgency. However, lesson observations do not always provide enough subject-specific evaluation or include a clear judgement on the progress made pupils in the lesson. In addition, subject coordinators have little involvement in monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects.

Pupils' progress over longer periods of time is monitored closely. Senior leaders have made sure that the regular assessments made by teachers are accurate and reliable. They hold termly meetings with each teacher to discuss the progress of the pupils they teach. Targets for pupils are now more ambitious, reflecting the drive for improvement.

The school improvement plans make clear what needs to improve and provide a very clear framework for monitoring progress towards the ambitious targets. The specific actions to be taken are not described in enough detail in the plan and it is not always clear who is in charge of each aspects. However, senior leaders can talk with authority about what they are doing to strengthen teaching. This includes training

sessions to highlight the features of good teaching and the use of strong teachers as role models for others. Leaders have some good ideas to encourage groups of teachers to work together on improving their practice, but these are still at an early stage of development. There has been good progress in improving the quality of marking and making sure that pupils respond to the 'next steps' set out for them.

Attendance is still below average. The school is trying hard to improve attendance in a challenging situation of high pupil mobility. For example, pupils sometimes remain on roll when they are no longer living locally. It is not clear how much effect such anomalies have on the overall figures.

Governors have confidence in the school leaders. They have a variety of means of gathering information, through links with year-groups and subjects and from the reports provided by senior leaders, which include information about pupils' progress. They ask pertinent questions and but are keen to develop ways of further strengthening their work.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. You have agreed to supply updates on pupils' attainment during this period and to provide copies of your headteacher's reports to the governing body.

External support

The local authority is helping the school to improve the teaching of reading. An adviser has helped to train staff in teaching phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and a link has been set up with another Ipswich school that has a strong track record in teaching reading, including higher level skills such as comprehension. The local authority has offered to conduct a review of governance. The diocese has been instrumental in establishing a link with a Hertfordshire school that faces a similar local context. Partnership work with schools in the local area and with other voluntary aided schools is well developed. As a result of this inspection, the school is now in touch with a school in Cambridgeshire which has similar deep-seated attendance issues.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk and the Director of Education for the St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector