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27 September 2013

Mrs Liz Bird  
Executive Headteacher  
Sibertswold Church of England Primary School  
Coldred Road  
Shepherdswell  
Kent  
CT15 7LF

Dear Mrs Bird

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sibertswold Church of England Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 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:

- sharpen the action plan to make the need to accelerate progress and narrow the gap for some pupils more explicit
- develop the marking of pupils' work so that:
  - there is a more consistent approach across the school
  - teachers tell pupils exactly what is expected and marking shows pupils exactly how well they have done
- develop links with good and outstanding schools to benefit from good practice.

## **Evidence**

During the visit I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, three governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and Governing Body action plan. I visited each classroom to see the school at work and spoke to pupils about their lessons and looked at the work in books. I looked at records of checks on teachers' planning and lessons.

## **Context**

Since the inspection in June, three teachers (two part time) have returned from maternity leave. A teacher has been appointed for the year to cover a teacher who left on maternity leave in September.

## **Main findings**

You acted quickly following the inspection in June, compiling a comprehensive action plan to address the areas for improvement. All staff and governors understand what needs to be done and are keen to support you in moving the school to 'good' as quickly as possible.

Since the inspection you have set up a careful system to check how well teachers are doing. You have rightly allocated the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders additional time to make sure this is in place and working well. As a result teachers receive helpful information about how to improve their lessons.

All staff are now much more aware of the need to check how well all pupils are doing. You have set high expectations for pupils in receipt of the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children with a parent or carer in the armed forces) but it is not clear enough on the action plan how well they should do. This makes it hard for governors to hold the school fully to account. Where required, these pupils, and lower attaining pupils, are now given additional support in small groups or individually to make sure they do as well as they should. It is too early in the year to see how effective this potentially useful work is. The new Homework Club is also a good opportunity to help these pupils with their work.

You have decided to group pupils according to ability when teaching the links between letters and sounds (phonics). This is helping pupils tackle work at the right level. It is pleasing to see the deputy headteacher is now providing useful training for teaching assistants to make sure they are confident to use their skills to teach phonics.

Teachers are beginning to develop classroom environments more effectively to support pupils in lessons. This is most effective where displays can be easily seen by

all the pupils and they use the information to help them with their work. They understand how the displays support them, saying, 'It is to make our writing better, we know what features to put in our stories.' You are rightly taking steps to share this best practice more fully across the school.

You have made a good start to develop pupils' independence, by ensuring work is well matched to what they can do so they are not as dependent on adults. Again, this work is at an early stage.

You have ensured teachers allocate time for pupils to improve their work so pupils can make corrections or try harder challenges. Pupils are responding positively. However, teachers' comments are sometimes too general and do not tell pupils exactly what they have done well. In addition there is not yet a consistent approach to marking across the school. This means pupils have to learn a new set of marking rules in each class, which holds them back. We discussed how you can build on good practice such as the use of a marking checklist seen in one class, and the need to provide clear guidance for pupils at the start of their work.

Governors are well focused on helping the school to move forward. Since the inspection they have developed more rigorous systems to check the work of the school. Membership of the strategy group, which checks how well the school is doing, has rightly been extended. Now more governors are developing their skills to hold the school to account. Governors have taken advantage of training to make sure they are using information well, and they ask the right questions to challenge the school's leaders. They have a very good understanding that some pupils need to make extra progress to catch up with where they should be but recognise that this needs to be made clearer in the school's action plan.

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**

Prior to the inspection the school received little support from the local authority. This has helpfully now been increased and is proving useful. For example the impact of recent training on classroom environments can already be seen in the newly created 'working walls'. The local authority should continue to monitor and review the school's progress closely while it 'requires improvement'.

The school has a very helpful partnership with RAiD (Raising Attainment in Dover), a group of local schools, and should develop further links with good and outstanding schools to provide development for teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard

**Her Majesty's Inspector**