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16 October 2013

Julie Millard and Anna Moss  
Acting Headteachers  
St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School  
Stoney Lane  
DY10 2LX

Dear Mrs Millard and Mrs Moss

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE (VA) Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 July 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:

- include short term measureable targets in the action plan to enable progress to be measured more regularly
- ensure all teachers have high expectations of pupils and tasks are well matched to the different abilities of the pupils they teach
- provide pupils with appropriate resources to support them in their writing
- ensure governors undertake regular and focussed monitoring activities to find out for themselves how the school is performing
- ensure an external review of governance is undertaken.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher, four representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated along with monitoring records and

a summary of current achievement data. Short visits were made to each classroom to talk to pupils and look at their work.

### **Context**

Since the inspection the headteacher has remained absent due to ill health. In September 2013 two headteachers from local schools were appointed as job share acting headteachers. A new subject leader for mathematics has been appointed. In order to strengthen the leadership team, upper and lower Key Stage 2 co-ordinators have been appointed.

### **Main findings**

Since your appointment you have taken swift and decisive action to make improvements. The action plan you have developed is focussed sharply on the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in July. Additional improvement areas have been included as a result of your thorough and accurate monitoring activities. The actions to be taken are clear, detailed and planned with an appropriate degree of urgency. The action plan includes end of year targets to enable the success of the actions to be measured, however it does not include shorter-term targets. It states clearly who will monitor the impact of the improvement work. The plan does not identify fully how governors will be involved in monitoring the success of the actions taken.

A more rigorous system of performance management for teachers has been introduced. Teachers have targets that relate directly to the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in July. Clear expectations about how much progress pupils should make have been made explicit.

Teachers in Years 1 and 2 have received coaching from you in order to improve their practice. They have also observed good practice in a neighbouring school. Initial monitoring suggests that some improvements are evident for example clear learning objectives are now used and purposeful learning environments have been established.

Teachers have recently received training on improving the feedback they provide for pupils and the marking policy has been reviewed. Evidence from my visits to classrooms shows that, in writing books, teachers are marking regularly and are starting to provide helpful comments to enable pupils to improve their work. Punctuation and spelling errors are being corrected regularly. This is more established in Year 4 and Year 6.

Pupil progress meetings are timetabled to be held more frequently. The summaries from the first round of these meetings show that they are now more sharply focussed on the learning needs of the pupils who are underachieving than had previously been the case.

Evidence from your monitoring activities and from my visits to classrooms shows that the tasks provided for pupils in most classes are not challenging enough and expectations of what pupils can achieve are not sufficiently high. This is preventing pupils from making the progress of which they are capable. Tasks are not well-matched to the needs of all learners.

In order to improve standards in writing, teachers have received a range of training, including identifying the features of good teaching, asking effective questions and planning a sequence of lessons. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work. Evidence from my visits to classrooms show that whilst some teachers provide resources to help pupils with their writing, for example word banks and working walls, these are not pitched at the right level to support pupils effectively.

Governors have a secure understanding of the key areas for improvement and about the actions that are being taken by senior leaders. However, they are not undertaking monitoring visits linked to the action plan to find out for themselves how the school is performing. Governors acknowledge that they have a range of training requirements in order to enable them to challenge senior leaders effectively. There are a number of vacancies on the governing body. An external review of governance is required.

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 is providing a range of good support. It acted swiftly to secure the two acting headteachers. Local authority officers are providing support to the mathematics and English subject leaders and the special needs co-ordinator. Weekly visits from a local authority officer are scheduled in order to monitor and support the improvements being made.

Further support from the local authority would be valuable in filling the remaining vacancies on the governing body.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Worcesterstershire.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**