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Miss Maire McGrory
Headteacher
St Michael's Church of England Primary School
Lower Church Road
Sandhurst
GU47 8HN

Dear Miss McGrory

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Michael's Church of England Primary School, Sandhurst

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 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:

- articulate governors' roles and responsibilities clearly in the school improvement plans
- evaluate actions to improve achievement in light of their impact on the attainment and progress of different groups of pupils
- make better use of lesson observations by making sure that records, discussions and training are focused on how well pupils are learning rather than on what teachers are doing
- make the cycle of improvement, incorporating data analysis, classroom visits, book checks and formal lesson observation, tighter and clearer, so that everyone involved understands precisely what needs to improve and how.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a representative of the diocese, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plans. I visited all classrooms, briefly observed teaching and looked at pupils' books and displays of their work.

Context

The deputy headteacher returned from maternity leave in September and has a job-share position in Year 6, teaching two days a week. The Foundation stage leader is continuing her role as acting deputy headteacher for two days a week.

Main findings

You fully accept the inspection findings and are working hard to address the areas for improvement. Improvement planning has evolved from an initially thin plan and now includes clearer timelines for improvement and a running evaluation of actions taken. This is helping to make improvements better focused.

Governors are highly committed. They attend training and review their work thoroughly to ensure that they are focused on the right things. They have an increasingly strong understanding of assessment information and are using this to better effect to understand and question the progress pupils make. However the school improvement plan does not make clear enough what the role of governors will be in monitoring the impact of actions taken.

Targets are more ambitious and better-focused on making sure that all students make at least good progress. Teachers have to explain, in pupil progress meetings, to senior leaders, how well each individual in their class is doing in relation to their targets. This is setting much higher expectations of achievement for all. However, senior leaders do not always analyse achievement information well enough for groups of pupils. They do not have a keen enough understanding of how well good teaching is closing gaps between different groups, or whether new gaps are emerging.

Where you do target particular groups, you are able to show evidence of improvement. There is good evidence in all classrooms of actions taken to develop pupils' writing and to ensure that boys, in particular, write more neatly, coherently, and at greater length. A whole-school visit to a sculpture park had fired pupils' imagination and led to some high-quality creative writing. The positive influence of this way of working is clear in displays and pupils' books.

Our short visits to lessons showed that the quality of teaching varies. Records of longer lesson observations and of similar drop-in visits are not sufficiently focused on the achievement of groups or on pupils' learning to eradicate inconsistencies quickly. They are still too concerned with what the teacher is doing rather than on what and how pupils are learning. Although they mention different groups, such as boys and girls, they do not give enough immediate and telling feedback to teachers about how well different pupils are responding to teaching methods so that there is improvement next lesson.

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

Officers representing the local authority and the diocese have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are providing useful support to you in developing sharper monitoring systems. Local authority reports of visit bring a helpful external view of progress, but mirror some of the school's internal monitoring systems in that they do not always give a sharp enough account of how well different groups of students are learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector