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Dianne Jones
Headteacher
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Higher Trehaverne
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Dear Mrs Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE School, Truro

Following my visit to your school on 26 November 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:

- increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, particularly in writing and mathematics, by:
 - extending teachers' skills in assessing the progress of all pupils during lessons and in adapting activities, the pace and their questions for individuals and groups to promote their consistently good progress
 - making sure that pupils use their individual targets, and teachers' written comments in marking, to improve their work
 - developing the skills of teaching assistants to promote consistently good learning and progress for identified pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, and the Chair of the Governing Body, and a telephone call was made to a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school and local authority action plans were evaluated. You and your deputy carried out joint observations with me in all classes and we looked at pupils' work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, a new Chair of Governors has been appointed. The school was awarded the Arts Mark Gold award in November 2013.

Main findings

The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers are making better use of the school's system for tracking progress to plan lessons to meet the needs of all pupils. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, more able pupils were enlarging triangles by a factor of three using computers. Those working at broadly average levels of attainment were rotating triangles through degrees, using tracing paper. Pupils with low prior attainment and special educational needs were being helped to understand co-ordinates by the teaching assistant's skilful questioning. The expectations of different groups are not so clear in all lessons across the school, especially when pupils are not encouraged to use their targets or comments in teachers' marking to challenge themselves to improve their work. Teaching assistants are not always clear about what the pupils they are asked to support are expected to learn by the end of the lesson.

In the most successful lessons, teachers regularly assess pupils' understanding and adapt the activities, pace and their questions to pupils' different learning needs. For example, in the Year 6 mathematics lesson, the teacher realised the more able pupils had quickly learned to increase the size of the triangles and so they were further challenged by the task of halving them. In a Year 2 literacy lesson, pupils with low prior attainment were given some additional help with spelling because they were unable to record their ideas as quickly as others. Weaknesses in spelling and handwriting are a barrier to learning for some of the pupils. Not all teachers are checking and extending pupils' learning and adapting their teaching throughout the lesson to help all pupils to make good progress.

The school's information indicates that most pupils are making at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Due to the improvements in teaching, increasing numbers of pupils are making good progress, although this is not yet consistent across all year groups. The gap in achievement for disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is

reducing. Published data, which is not yet validated, shows pupils are making good progress over time and attaining better than the national average in writing by the end of Key Stage 2 and in reading by the end of both Key Stages 1 and 2. The school is aware that more needs to be done to improve writing by the end of Key Stage 1 and mathematics across the school.

The headteacher, ably supported by two senior leaders, is checking the progress of all pupils and tackling underachievement more systematically. The leadership team is making sure that pupil premium funding is now being spent specifically to improve the progress of eligible pupils. Teachers are providing intervention sessions and they are being held to account for the progress their pupils are making each term. As a result, improvements are beginning to be seen. In particular, pupils are making good progress in reading. Reading is given a high profile in the school, for example in exciting role play areas such as 'The Polar Express' train and 'Narnia'. The high quality displays of pupils' work and excellent resources throughout the school create a positive environment for learning and contribute to pupils' good behaviour.

To sustain the improvements, all senior leaders are developing skills in monitoring and evaluation, including lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, and discussion with pupils. Their self-evaluation is accurate. The school's action plan provides clear direction for improvement on the areas identified in the section 5 inspection. The local authority's action plan contains targets that are helping the Governing Body to measure the school's improvement each term. The new Chair of Governors is a deputy headteacher of a local secondary school. He is using his experience in monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress well to support the Governing Body in its role of holding the school to account for the progress being made by all pupils in all year groups.

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 school is making effective use of a good range of external support provided by the local authority. The support includes funding for the school to join the 'Achievement for All' initiative, termly monitoring by the Cornwall School Improvement Team with a focus on developing the deputy's leadership skills, and links with a local outstanding school. The school and local authority's School Improvement Team attended Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminar and found it helpful. Subsequently, the local authority provided a workshop based on Ofsted's seminar for local schools that had been given a grade 3 in their last section 5 inspection. The school attended the workshop and shared ideas with other schools. The Chair of Governors produced a report for the school's Governing Body to disseminate the key messages from the Ofsted seminar. In addition, the governors received training from

a local authority adviser. As a result of this wide ranging support, senior leaders and governors are monitoring and evaluating more rigorously the progress of all pupils and the actions that are being taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to accelerate improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater

Her Majesty's Inspector