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Mr A Squire
Headteacher
Totnes St John's Church of England Primary School
Pathfields
Totnes
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Dear Mr Squire

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Totnes St. John Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 03 December 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. 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:

- make sure all teachers adapt the activities to pupils' needs so that all can make as much progress as possible in lessons
- rigorously monitor the extra support in place for pupils entitled to the pupil premium and those in Year Three who have fallen behind
- work with the local authority to formally review progress with this improvement work by April 2014.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders and three members of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I scrutinised a range of documents and visited two lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection in November 2012, three class teachers have left and four new members have joined the governing body.

Main findings

A key issue that remains for the school is to address the fall in achievement at the end of Key Stage One and to support those pupils currently in Year 3 who did not reach the levels expected for their age last year. You have provided additional support to help pupils to develop their reading and writing skills, which has had good impact this term. You have taken effective action in raising the attendance of vulnerable pupils. However, whilst pupils eligible for the pupil premium make good progress in most year groups, this is not yet uniformly the case.

You have increased the rigour of systems for tracking the progress pupils make in reading, writing and mathematics. Challenging but realistic targets have been set for them. Attainment for most year groups increased last year, including Year 6, whose results in the national tests were much improved. The proportion of pupils making more than expected rates of progress increased across Years 3-6. You are not complacent however, and know that, given the starting points for most pupils joining Key Stage Two, the school must aim for above average standards in 2014. One reason for this improvement has been the 'next steps' approach to target setting with pupils. They know the steps to take in building up core skills and review these regularly with a teacher.

The improvements in achievement are also due to a tighter focus on ensuring good quality teaching. Senior and subject leaders regularly visit lessons. You provide more focused advice on each teacher's practice and set them personalised targets through performance management. Professional development is given a high priority for teachers and teaching assistants. The staff are required to carry out developmental tasks. Teachers visit other schools to see best practice and subject leaders provide good advice to colleagues. Consequently, the quality of teaching is improving. Those teachers that have been classified as not yet good are fully aware of the expectations and are given targeted support. Where teaching is less effective, the match between the work set for different groups of pupils and their needs is imprecise.

The governing body has re-organised and governors have attended training, following a 'health-check' review of their work. They are now better placed to provide challenge and support for the school. They receive good quality information from all leaders in the school and visit regularly, for example, shadowing the numeracy subject leader's monitoring work. They know the school's strengths and emerging priorities for improvement.

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

You have received close support from Devon Local Authority. Since the last inspection, its officers have provided effective challenge and support for you and senior leaders in developing systems for tracking pupils' achievement and leading the improvement of teaching. The governing body has received a 'health check' review of their work. Individual governors regularly attend training and briefing sessions which have helped them increase their knowledge and understanding when holding you to account.

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

Yours sincerely

David Townsend
Her Majesty's Inspector