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Mr K Harvey
Headteacher
St Nicolas Church of England Junior School
Link Road
Newbury
RG14 7LU

Dear Mr Harvey

Requires improvement: second monitoring inspection visit to St Nicolas Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 5 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are now taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that senior staff work alongside individual teachers who need support to develop their skills
- communicate consistently high expectations to pupils about the acceptable standards of handwriting and spelling in their work.

Evidence

During the visit, we observed teaching and learning in three lessons and one small-group support session. Meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and with the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

Main findings

The pace of improvement in the school has accelerated since the last monitoring inspection. School leaders and managers have made significant improvements to systems and processes and the changes have been implemented quickly by staff. For example, the headteacher has introduced rigorous procedures to check on the quality of teaching. Information from lesson observations, checks on pupils' books and scrutiny of teachers' planning is now carefully triangulated. This means that school leaders and the governing body have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the teaching team. Senior staff ensure that teachers get high-quality feedback on what they need to do to improve and any agreed actions are followed up. However, there is still inconsistency in the quality of teaching and in teachers' expectations. Some teachers need tailored support from senior staff to develop their skills.

An officer from the local authority has worked closely with the headteacher to improve the quality of the school's development plan. This document now sets out clear, measurable targets for improvement. The latest information on pupils' progress this term has already been matched against the short-term targets in the plan. This has provided staff and governors with valuable insights into the pace of the school's progress so far this year.

The governing body is increasingly effective in its work. Well-focused training has enabled all governors to develop their skills and knowledge. Key governors have attended school review meetings with officers from the local authority and have contributed to the revision of the school development plan. A comprehensive programme of school visits will enable all governors to see the pupils at work and evaluate the progress that is being made.

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 link adviser from the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education has given very effective support to governors. This has enabled them to develop their skills in monitoring the work of the school through visits to classrooms. Individual governors have made very good use of 'guided governor visits' accompanied by the link adviser.

The school has engaged well with the support and training provided by the local authority. An officer from the local authority has given good guidance to school leaders and this has helped them to focus more clearly on what needs to be done.

The positive relationship with the 'feeder' infant school continues to develop and the headteacher has also established a link with a junior school in Hampshire.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire and the Director of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education.

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles

Her Majesty's Inspector