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Mrs A Chitty
Headteacher
St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Dover Road
Northfleet
Gravesend
Kent
DA11 9PL

Dear Mrs Chitty

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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:

- establish a senior leadership team containing sufficient people with the time and expertise to carry out the work needed to improve the day-to-day quality of teaching across the school
- ensure that pupil premium funding is carefully targeted to make the maximum impact and that all pupils entitled to the pupil premium receive its support
- include, within the much improved school improvement plan, the specific work of governors in monitoring progress against the plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated documents including data about pupils' progress and attainment, reports to governors and the school improvement plan. We visited together lessons across the school and looked at examples of pupils' writing from Years 2 and 6.

Context

Since the inspection, you have been appointed as the permanent headteacher.

Main findings

You have a sharp understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You show a real heart for the school and its community but, correctly, you are not at all defensive about where improvement is needed. You know that the school has fallen behind where it could be. Your vision for the school's future is clear and compelling; I saw you demonstrate strong leadership during my visit.

You say that much of the teaching in the school requires improvement. Teaching lacks, at times, vitality and excitement and, as you put it, 'oomph'! Sometimes teachers still do too much of the thinking for the pupils and over-control lessons. The classrooms, as we both noted, are appropriately organised and resourced, but not always exciting enough places for children to learn. All this leads to pupils' progress and attainment being mediocre. The relatively small numbers of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding, in general, do not make quite as much progress as their peers. Although pupil premium expenditure is carefully monitored, it is not certain that all entitled pupils gain sufficient benefit. We discussed how the school could explore inventive ways of meeting the needs of all such pupils.

Since the inspection, you have made a number of useful changes, as you have become more established in the role of headteacher. For example, the process for checking on the progress of pupils in English and mathematics is much sharper. After their regular discussions with senior staff, teachers receive very helpful summaries of how well all pupils in their classes are doing. You are undertaking useful training and have a valued link with an experienced local headteacher, who is acting as your mentor. With well-focused support from the local authority, you have revised the school improvement plan very effectively. It explains in very clear, simple language what needs to be done, why and when. It is a succinct and effective working document. It correctly emphasises the key need to improve teaching and learning.

Alongside all of this, the school is growing rapidly through a planned expansion. You are rightly clear that the associated major building works should not take up too much of your time. Nevertheless, this is a definite pressure on you (as well as a great opportunity for the school). Other senior staff also have limited time. This creates a very immediate problem. For the foreseeable future, there is an important, time-consuming, job for senior staff to do in working alongside and coaching staff, guiding them in improving their day-to-day work. The senior leadership team does not presently have the capacity to do this, and this should be addressed urgently. The school shortly needs to make key decisions about its future senior leadership structure and the experience it will need. The local authority has reached the same conclusion and I had useful discussions with its representative, as well as with you and the governors, about how this matter might move forward.

The school has many obvious strengths and positive attributes. One of these is its palpable sense of community with distinct Christian values. I heard the most clear, expressive and accurate singing of (quite difficult) Christmas carols by pupils on my visit. I found this so enriching that I stayed longer than expected to listen. Governors, led sympathetically by the Chair, carefully safeguard the school's ethos. They have improved their work with the help of a local review. New governors have joined with specific, useful skills. Governors' visits to the school now have much clearer purposes. The training and development of the governing body is having positive impact. I discussed with the Chair of Governors how best to ensure this improvement continues. We agreed that defining the role of governors in monitoring the school improvement plan more tightly within the plan itself would be one useful step.

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 values the support, challenge and advice received from the local authority since the inspection and uses it well. The local authority understands the school and its needs clearly. Its attached adviser is very helpfully and carefully considering how, with the agreement of all parties, it might be possible to increase the capacity within the senior leadership team quickly, while the school makes longer-term arrangements.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector