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Ms Donna Calloway
St John's CofE (C) Primary School
Wombourne Road
Swindon
Dudley
DY3 4NB

Dear Ms Calloway

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John's CofE (C) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 31 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 November 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.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher and with the Chair of the Governing Body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated school leaders' plans for improving the school and I reviewed the information you provided about pupils' progress. I also considered minutes of governors' meetings as well as minutes from a local authority review. In addition, I looked at records of the checks leaders make on the quality of teaching.

Context

This is a small school with 4 classes. Since the inspection, one teacher has resigned and will leave the school at the end of the spring term. The school has advertised for a new teacher but has not yet been successful in making an appointment. The school has therefore made appropriate arrangements for the summer term. A supply teacher is covering another class due to the long term absence of a permanent member of staff. The headteacher teaches for two days each week and is currently co-ordinating provision for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs. There are two vacancies on the governing body and the three parent governors are relatively new to the role.

Main findings

You and the deputy headteacher have responded positively to the findings of the recent inspection. You are determined to ensure that St John's quickly becomes a good school. You have, quite rightly, focused on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' achievement. Your plans identify what needs to be done to improve teaching and set out how this will be achieved. You have documented the actions taken so far and are evaluating their impact.

You have improved your systems for checking on teachers' performance and are becoming more effective in holding teachers to account for the progress made by pupils in their class. School leaders are now regularly visiting lessons and checking pupils' books to ensure that teaching provides sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities. Every teacher now meets with you every half term to evaluate the progress of pupils in their class and to identify and respond to the needs of any pupils who are not making good progress. These meetings are valuable but you are right in your plans to ensure that they provide sufficient challenge to teachers and include opportunities to check the accuracy of teachers' assessments.

Each teacher now has a 'professional learning journal' which includes an individual plan identifying priorities for improvement. These priorities have been identified by leaders as a result of the checks they have made on teaching and on pupils' progress. These plans include clear expectations and timescales, particularly for those teachers whose work requires improvement. The work of teaching assistants has also been reviewed to identify common strengths and areas for development.

Since the inspection, you have made improvements to the ways that teachers mark pupils' work. Teachers' comments are now giving pupils better advice about how they should improve their work. Marking is very effective in some classes but this is not yet consistent across the school. You are also holding 'learning conversations' with pupils when you talk to them about their learning and about their targets or 'next steps'. This is enabling you to check pupils' understanding and gauge their attitudes to learning and school.

You and the deputy headteacher are making improvements to the ways that you use information about pupils' progress and attainment to enable you to make accurate judgements about standards in each year group. You are also working with teachers to make sure that their assessments of individual pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are based on secure evidence and are accurate and consistent. Your evidence suggests that the accuracy of these assessments is improving but that further work is needed to ensure that the judgements made by all teachers are correct. You are rightly seeking additional opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues beyond the school to moderate these judgements.

Teachers have completed assessments with all pupils to determine their reading age and this information is being used to check that reading books are at the correct level of difficulty for each child. You have also ensured that each child has a daily opportunity to read with an adult or a 'reading buddy'. You are making sure that reading books for younger pupils allow them to practise and apply their developing knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make.)

Training has been planned to improve teachers' subject knowledge and skills in the teaching of English and mathematics. Individual teachers are being supported by school leaders and by local authority advisors.

The governing body has an accurate overview of the school's strengths and areas for development. The Chair of the Governing Body shares the determination of the school leaders to make the necessary improvements without delay. Governors have begun to focus their meetings more effectively on the quality of teaching and on pupils' learning and have become more involved in checking information about pupils' progress. Some training has already been provided to ensure that governors have a better understanding of how the progress and attainment of pupils compares with pupils nationally. Minutes of meetings indicate that governors are starting to ask questions and provide more appropriate challenge to school leaders. Governors need support to ensure that they all have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They welcome the external review of governance, which is being arranged by the local authority. Currently, there are only seven members of the governing body as there are two vacancies. Governors should continue their efforts to fill these vacancies and so develop additional strength and capacity. Governors and school leaders know that it is essential that they appoint a good teacher to fill the vacancy which will be created in the summer term.

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 local authority is providing good support to help the school improve. A representative from the local authority has visited the school to meet with school leaders and governors, visit lessons, look at books and evaluate plans for

improvement. Similar meetings will take place each half term. The local authority is also arranging for an external review of governance. The local authority has identified a headteacher from a high performing school (a Local Leader of Education) to provide on-going support and challenge to school leaders at St John's. In addition local authority advisors for English and mathematics are providing training as well as support for individual teachers. Advice has also been provided to help the school meet the needs of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel
Her Majesty's Inspector