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Ms Nerys Hughes
Headteacher
St Bartholomew's Church of England Primary School
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Hall Street
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Dear Ms Hughes

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Bartholomew's Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 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 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 opportunities for extended writing in Year 3. So that pupils learn to write fluently and spell simple words correctly
- give pupils more opportunities to deepen their understanding of mathematics by applying what they have learned to solving problems set in new and real life contexts
- check that when teachers mark pupils' work and give them feedback about how the work can be improved, pupils follow it up
- make sure that all the recommendations of the review of governance are fully implemented.

Evidence

During this visit I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, a group of articulate and charming Year 6 pupils, two classroom teachers, representatives of the governing body and a local authority officer. All these meetings were held to determine the progress that

the school is making against each of the areas for improvement identified at the most recent full school inspection. I scrutinised the work in a range of mathematics and literacy books from pupils in Year 3 and Year 6 and examined the minutes of governing body meetings held since my previous visit. You accompanied me on a tour of the school where we visited a number of classrooms and saw pupils at work on a variety of activities related to literacy and numeracy.

Context

Since my previous visit the local authority has carried out a review of governance. An individual with extensive experience in primary education has now joined the governing body. A member of staff who taught pupils in Key Stage 1 has left the school and has been replaced by a temporary teacher. You are currently in the process of recruiting a permanent member of staff to this position.

Main findings

Evidence from the work scrutiny I carried out indicates that senior leaders are effectively improving the quality of teaching. In Year 3 and Year 6 the work in books shows that pupils are being given work at an appropriate level of challenge for their age and there is evidence that activities are being matched to the needs of the different groups of pupils in the class. However, this practice is stronger in Year 6 than it is in Year 3; consequently pupils' progress in Year 6 is accelerating.

The teaching of writing continues to improve and there are some good examples of interesting and imaginative pieces of work, produced by pupils in Year 6. In Year 3 pupils' progress in handwriting has continued to improve since the start of the year; however, there are too few examples of pupils writing creatively in order to produce an extended piece of work independently of their teacher. In addition weaknesses in pupils' spelling are slowing their progress.

In the mathematics books I examined there were few examples of pupils being challenged to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills by solving problems and carrying out investigations. Consequently opportunities for pupils to think deeply about the subject, strengthen their skills in calculation and make links with other areas of mathematics are being missed.

To improve the quality of teaching of literacy and to address deficiencies in the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make), evident in last year's Year 1 phonics test results, you have made a number of changes. These include reorganising the way that pupils are grouped in KS1 for phonics teaching and using a published scheme to provide a coherent approach to the teaching of reading and writing across the school. However, these developments are at an early stage and there has not been enough time to measure their impact.

Senior leaders check pupils' progress carefully, collecting data every half-term to determine how well pupils are doing. This enables them to identify, quickly, those pupils who are underachieving and put in place extra help to get them back on track. A termly report for parents keeps them up-to-date with their children's progress.

The standard of marking continues to improve; teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in line with school policy. In the best examples teachers indicate what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Teachers then make sure that points for improvement are followed up by the pupils, enabling them to learn from their mistakes. However, this practice is inconsistent and, as a result, some marking is not having sufficient impact on pupils' progress. This is because some pupils do not follow up their teachers' comments on how their work can be improved.

The strategy for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, introduced prior to the first monitoring inspection, is now established. Senior leaders and curriculum coordinators regularly observe lessons. They supplement evidence from these observations with scrutiny of pupils' work. As a result they have an accurate and reliable picture of the quality of teaching across the school and teachers are held rigorously to account for the quality of their classroom practice. Your monitoring records indicate that there is no longer any inadequate teaching in the school and you are providing effective support to those members of staff whose practice falls below your high expectations.

Since my previous visit governance has been strengthened. There is now a governor with extensive experience in primary education. This new governor has worked with you to collect first hand evidence on the quality of teaching and learning in the school and has confirmed the reliability of your judgements. Minutes of governing body meetings show how you and your colleagues are being held to account for the progress being made against each of the priorities in the school development plan. However, plans to link individual governors with subject areas and key stages have yet to be implemented. Consequently, opportunities for individual governors to take a lead in key areas of the governing body's work are being missed.

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's monitoring and intervention team, in place at the time of my previous visit, are no longer supporting the school. The local authority has evidence of the progress that the school has made under your leadership and the capacity of senior leaders and governors to further improve the school without additional help. Nevertheless, you are continuing to receive effective but lighter touch support and guidance from a local authority school adviser.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire and the Diocesan Board of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector