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13 February 2014

Mr Steve Wells
Headteacher
Kingsclere Church of England Primary School
Ash Grove
Newbury
RG20 5RE

Dear Mr Wells

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kingsclere Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The first monitoring inspection took place in May 2013.

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:

- ensure that activities in the Reception classes provide children with more opportunities to play cooperatively and enrich their development of language.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, a representative from the local authority and four members of the governing body, including the Chair of Governors, to discuss the action taken since

the last inspection. Documents relating to improvements in the school were evaluated. Teaching was observed in nearly all years, including the Reception class. Observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

Context

Since the inspection three teachers have left the school. A new deputy headteacher has been in post since September 2013 and two teachers have joined the school.

Main findings

Since the previous monitoring inspection the work of the headteacher and school leaders has gone from strength to strength. As the chair of governors said, 'the headteacher has transformed the school'. Weaker teaching is not tolerated and is dealt with firmly. Teachers who did not meet the raised expectations have now left the school. The new deputy headteacher has strengthened leadership further and made improvements to teaching throughout the school. She is a strong role model in the classroom and has quickly won the respect of the whole school community.

The headteacher has restructured the senior team in order to achieve the right balance of skills and experience. He has made his high expectations crystal clear: plans to improve the school set out exactly what better teaching, achievement and leadership will look like. Phase and subject leaders do not just talk about improving the school, but take effective action. The headteacher confirms that they are 'doers' not 'talkers'. For example, a programme of coaching, led by senior leaders, is targeting remaining areas of weaker teaching and helping to support new teachers.

Pupils' attainment in all subjects at the end of Key Stage 1 compares favourably with that of pupils nationally. The school has taken effective steps to improve boys' attainment. There is clear evidence that pupils are making better progress by the end of Key Stage 2, although the school correctly identifies that higher-attaining pupils and those eligible for free school meals do not make enough progress in reading. School leaders are ensuring that appropriate action is being taken to ensure that pupils not making enough progress catch up quickly. This includes the current Year 5 class who did not make good enough progress in the past. Pupils eligible for free school meals are targeted in all teachers' planning and are a focus for every pupil progress meeting.

School leaders have introduced 'learning arrows' as a better method of setting challenging targets in lessons. Teachers can check pupils' progress during lessons without interrupting the flow of teaching and learning. Teachers structure lessons and groups of pupils more effectively and flexibly, taking more account of different abilities and how well pupils are progressing through tasks. The deployment of teaching assistants has also improved. Teaching assistants are directed to work with

the full range of pupils, including the most able. In several lessons observed during the monitoring inspection, teaching assistants 'thought on their feet' and checked the learning of pupils of all abilities. If pupils were struggling, the teaching assistants tackled their difficulties effectively and ensured that they could move on with their learning.

Marking of pupils' work is more thorough and useful. Pupils have the chance to improve their work and learn from their mistakes because teachers allow them 'reflect and respond' time and give them specific advice to follow. Clear signs of progress and consistently higher standards of presentation are evident in pupils' books. However, school leaders have rightly identified that more work needs to be done to improve handwriting. A new handwriting programme has only been in place for a short time, so its impact has been limited.

There is now a better balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities in the Reception classes and Year 1. Learning and play are planned around a theme and there are linked activities promoting early reading and numeracy skills. There is also clear evidence that pupils in Year 1 are being challenged, particularly in writing and mathematics. However, during the monitoring inspection, a few activities in the Reception class and mixed Reception and Year 1 class did not enable pupils to develop their cooperative play. Some pupils became too boisterous and unnecessarily noisy during child-initiated activities, so opportunities to listen to each other, take turns and practise enriched language were lost.

Governors continue to provide challenge, encourage ambition and drive improvement in the school. They have adjusted their committee structure in line with school leaders' roles and welcome opportunities to work in closer collaboration. Governors have developed a better understanding of pupils' progress data and how the school's performance will be judged.

Her Majesty's Inspector 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 was providing high priority support for the school before the section 5 inspection. The headteacher has benefited from strong guidance and challenge as part of a programme for new school leaders. Specialist subject advisors have provided helpful advice and training for English and mathematics. The local authority has also commissioned useful links with good and outstanding schools. The school is now regarded as a medium priority for the local authority, owing to the improvements that have been made and the increased strength of the school leadership team. Nevertheless, school leaders would benefit from a link with schools that can demonstrate good and outstanding practice in the Reception Year.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector