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Mr David Snell
Headteacher
St Nicholas' CofE Middle School
Main Street
Pinvin
Pershore
WR10 2ER

Dear Mr Snell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Nicholas' CofE Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 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 January 2014. 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 make sure:

- all senior leaders take on additional responsibility in formally monitoring teaching and learning and providing feedback to individual teachers
- teacher assessments have been externally validated to ensure they are as accurate as possible
- the attainment gap with the national average in writing is closing as quickly as it is in reading and mathematics
- pupils' concerns about the quality of teaching in religious education (RE) are followed up.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, three members of the Governing Body including the Chair and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated.

Context

There has been a change in the leadership of literacy since the last inspection.

Main findings

You and the governors have acted swiftly to put in place an action plan to address the issues from the last inspection. The highly knowledgeable and experienced governing body have established an effective system of holding leaders to account through the setting up of link and scrutiny governors who offer support and challenge respectively.

A system of judging the quality of teaching taking a wider range of evidence into consideration as well as direct observation of lessons is now in place and is effective in identifying next steps for teachers. A new marking policy is in place and all leaders are now involved in checking its impact through scrutiny of pupils' books. Governors have observed teaching with you to see first-hand whether actions taken have led to improvements.

Members of the large senior leadership team are undertaking a wider range of monitoring activities such as learning walks and scrutiny of books but are not yet sufficiently involved with formal observations of teaching or giving individual feedback to teachers. There has been a very recent change in leadership of literacy. It is too early to see the impact of this change in accelerating progress in writing which is currently not as fast as it is in reading and mathematics.

You have set challenging targets for pupils to achieve and systems for monitoring their progress at regular intervals are now in place. As yet the accuracy of the teachers' assessments has not been externally validated but school figures indicate Year 5 overall progress is in line with other year groups.

A number of initiatives have been introduced to engage boys in writing including handwriting and punctuation clubs. Careful consideration has been made concerning texts studied, and more use made of writing using information and communication technology. This has been well received by the boys spoken to during the visit. Girls too have noticed a change in the way teachers are engaging boys in writing more successfully in lessons which has led to more positive attitudes in learning.

The school has also introduced booster groups led by senior leaders to increase the proportion of pupils achieving the highest possible levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils recognise that lessons are now more fun with increased opportunities for practical work, creative writing and more choice in the activities undertaken. Pupils spoken to were unanimous in their view that unlike other subjects RE is not taught well in school.

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 has been active in providing additional support, for example in special education needs and the writing of support plans. They are checking how the school is doing through regular project board meetings. A local authority representative has observed teaching with you to verify your judgements and establish the quality of teaching in the school. The local authority recognises the need for further validation of teacher assessments.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims
Her Majesty's Inspector