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Mr D Watson
Headteacher
St Pauls' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
School Lane
Swanley
BR8 7PJ

Dear Mr Watson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Pauls' Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 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 and the deputy headteacher 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- rewrite the school improvement plan as a single document with clear timescales and measurable short-term and long-term
- review the current tracking system so that records of pupils' progress are clear and accessible to staff and governors
- ensure that teachers receive high quality feedback following classroom observation or monitoring.
- redistribute leadership roles and responsibilities more evenly
- establish a formal link with a good or better school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. We discussed the action taken since the last inspection. The two school improvement plans were evaluated and your records of the checks made on the quality of teaching were scrutinised.

Main findings

You and your staff have accepted the inspection judgements and are anxious to improve the school quickly. However, you do not have a clear, strategic vision of how the school will get to 'good'. School improvement planning is muddled and does not set out a coherent programme of action for the year. There are two separate improvement plans that have similar priorities, but are not linked. There are no measurable short-term targets for pupils' achievement or for improvements in teaching and too many actions have open-ended timescales. As a result, it is not possible for the governing body to hold school leaders to account for the progress of the action plan.

Improvement since the inspection at the end of January has been too slow. You have not visited lessons this term to check on the quality of teaching and records of previous monitoring from the autumn term show that teachers do not receive enough feedback on what they need to do to improve. There is no planned programme of professional development for staff to ensure that they keep up to date and continue to develop their skills.

The system you have developed to track pupils' progress is too complicated and does not provide clear information for staff or governors. Reports from the latest assessments of pupils' achievement appear to contradict previous information provided to the governing body in February.

Leadership roles are not distributed equitably. The part-time deputy headteacher has too many responsibilities, whereas other experienced teachers on the staff do not have significant roles in leading development in the school. Currently, there are no structured opportunities for newly qualified teachers to work alongside more experienced staff to develop their skills and prepare for middle leadership roles.

The external review of governance recommended at the time of the previous inspection is underway. Recent training has helped governors to understand their roles and responsibilities in holding school leaders to account. However, it is too early to see any evidence of increased challenge from the governing body.

Ofsted will carry out a further monitoring visit in May 2014 and will provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Officers from the local authority monitor the school's progress closely through regular meetings with the headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body. The designated improvement adviser from the local authority also visits regularly. Her reports indicate that she has made clear recommendations to school leaders, but her advice has not always been acted upon.

The school does not have well developed links with other providers in the locality and there are few opportunities for staff to visit other schools to see good and outstanding practice and learn from colleagues.

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

Melanie Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector