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Frances Neil
Headteacher
St Mary's, Prittlewell, CofE Primary School
Boston Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
SS2 6JH

Dear Mrs Neil

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's, Prittlewell, CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 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.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You and I observed teaching in all 15 classes and I looked at a range of pupils' writing books.

Context

There have been no significant changes in the school's context since the last inspection.

Main findings

The quality of teaching has improved hugely since the last inspection. Much more teaching is now good, although too little is yet outstanding. Phonics teaching is a strength and pupils are successfully making links between the way letters sound and how words are spelled.

There are more frequent and rigorous observations of teaching with useful feedback for teachers on what is going well and what needs to be improved. However, this process can be further refined by ensuring more explicit feedback on how well teachers have done against areas for improvement from the last observation. Written feedback from lesson observations does not have a sufficiently sharp focus on pupils' progress or on the impact of what the teacher does on pupils' learning.

Marking has improved significantly since the last inspection and is often good. Pupils know how to respond to teachers' suggestions and in many classes marking results in clear improvements in pupils' work. In a few classes pupils do not respond to teachers' suggestions so that their work does not improve as quickly as it could. Teachers do not always refer back to these suggestions for improvement in later marking so that pupils can be clear about whether or not they have been successful. Good marking can be seen in a range of subjects. Most pupils know what their targets for improvement are and what they need to do to reach them. Links between individual pieces of working and longer term targets are now well established. Teachers are now more rigorous in monitoring the work in pupils' books and ensuring the quality and quantity of work is improving.

Pupils have opportunities to write at length. The introduction of a single book for almost all writing is resulting in more consistent and higher expectations across a range of subjects. The quality of writing is higher than at the time of the last inspection and pupils' handwriting is improving. Older pupils are successfully making the often difficult transition from writing in pencil to using pens. Most pupils form letters carefully and consistently.

In lessons, pupils listen carefully and are eager to learn. Relationships are strong resulting in confident pupils who have positive attitudes to learning. Teachers generally ask a good range of questions which challenge pupils and make them think harder. Some teachers are highly effective in prompting pupils to use more interesting and exciting vocabulary to enliven their speech and writing. Others intervene too quickly when pupils are unsure or do not answer well enough, instead of encouraging them to reflect and provide better answers themselves.

Development planning is generally well structured with good links to areas for improvement from the last inspection. The school development plan describes appropriate actions but success criteria do not have a sharp enough focus on measurable outcomes, particularly the impact of the school's actions on pupils' attainment and progress. It does not make the link between the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement sufficiently explicit.

While the governors know the school well and visit regularly they will not be able to hold the school sufficiently to account for pupils' achievement unless clearer links are made between the school's actions and pupils' achievement.

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 school has received prompt support from the local authority. Teachers have been able to observe outstanding teaching and incorporate aspects into their own practice. The headteacher has valued support from a national leader of education from a local school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Southend-on-Sea and the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Yours sincerely

Robert Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector