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19 September 2014

Mrs J Hoggarth-Allen
Headteacher
St Columba Church of England Primary Academy
Tewksbury Avenue
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Hants
PO15 6LL

Dear Mrs Hoggarth-Allen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Columba Church of England Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 19 September 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 academy should take further action to:

- use more effective strategies to prevent poor behaviour so that pupils are not excluded
- improve the action plan so it is clear how you will increase the effectiveness of middle leaders and how you will check whether the planned actions are working, over time, in improving outcomes for pupils.
- track more carefully the progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, analysing how best to support them.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders and governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also talked to representatives from the diocese. I visited classes with you, scrutinised work in pupils' books and evaluated the academy improvement plan.

Main findings

You have responded purposefully to the judgement that the academy 'requires improvement'. The actions you have taken to tackle the weaknesses identified in the inspection report are effective but you are not ambitious enough for the pupils at your academy.

The action plan details how you intend to improve the school but it is not clear enough how you will increase the effectiveness of middle leaders or improve outcomes for specific groups of pupils and individuals. The plan also needs to show more clearly how staff actions will improve pupils' learning, immediately and over time as you seek to reach your long term targets. Only with greater clarity will you be able to check if things are working.

Your introduction of a new marking scheme is positive and teachers are using it increasingly well. The written comments to pupils telling them what they have done well, is motivating for pupils and helps them to recognise when they have been successful. You have rightly planned further training to improve the comments identifying the next steps in learning, because these are not always clear enough.

When visiting classes, we saw improvements with teachers using relevant learning objectives, and most of the activities supported learning well. In Years 5 and 6, teachers had sensibly carried out an assessment at the beginning of the topic to see what pupils could do. They used this information effectively to make sure the learning for each pupil was at the right level. Not all time in lessons is used well enough, for example in one class pupils spent longer than they needed identifying unfamiliar vocabulary in a text. In another, all the pupils sat doing nothing because one or two children were delayed in joining the class on the carpet.

I am pleased to see you are now holding middle leaders more fully to account for pupils' learning. The English leader has sensibly changed how and when the children have opportunities to write, so that pupils are now writing with a sense of purpose, across a range of subjects. The new 'role-play' area for Years 3 and 4 has the potential to inspire pupils to write creatively and the writing about the visit to the museum demonstrated pupils' interest and engagement. Nevertheless, your action plan does not show clearly enough how you intend to develop their work further.

The new behaviour management strategy has had a positive impact on behaviour around the school and in classrooms, because you and the staff are now clear about your expectations. All the staff I spoke to commented on how calm lessons are now that pupils' behaviour is improving. Your regular checks on teaching should include looking at behaviour, to ensure expectations of all pupils are consistently high.

Although behaviour is improving there are still too many exclusions. The school is too quick to exclude as a response to inappropriate behaviour. Leaders and staff need to find ways of pre-empting and managing more challenging behaviour, so that the behaviour is de-escalated or corrected, rather than pupils excluded.

Governors' ask challenging questions about pupils and groups who are not achieving well enough. They regularly check how much progress has been made with the action plan. However, they cannot check whether what you are doing is helping pupils to make more progress, because the intended impact is not clear in the plan. They rightly expressed concerns about the purpose and effectiveness of excluding pupils.

External support

As a result of changes of personnel, the diocese is now providing effective challenge and support for leaders, but this support has been slow to come and inconsistent. Leaders are rightly very positive about the regularity and effectiveness of recent visits, but governors do not have sufficient awareness of the current level of support or the diocesan concerns about the academy's progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire, the Diocese of Portsmouth, and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Seconded Inspector