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Mrs Amy Chitty
Headteacher
St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Dover Road
Northfleet
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Kent
DA11 9PL

Dear Mrs Chitty

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Botolph's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 October 2013. 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:

- develop teachers' leadership and management roles, especially as subject leaders, so that the whole curriculum, in all subjects, is increasingly challenging and engaging for pupils
- evaluate how well pupils in each class are learning beyond the aspects of English and mathematics which are already usefully discussed in regular progress meetings.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with a representative of the local authority. You and I toured the school together, briefly observing lessons in all classes and looking at some samples of pupils' work. I evaluated school documents including the school improvement plan, data showing pupils' progress and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since my last visit, a new building has opened to enable the expansion of the school roll. A new deputy headteacher began work in September. The school expects to become an academy, within a local multi-academy trust, within the next few months.

Main findings

You continue to lead the school with considerable energy, commitment and resilience. Consequently, the school has improved in many ways and pupils are getting a better deal. Given the many challenges you have faced, this is a no mean feat, for which you deserve much credit. You have made some necessarily hard choices. The new building is smoothly up and running. As time has gone on, you have realised the importance of delegation to, and empowerment of, the staff team you are building. As you have grown in the role of headteacher, you have become increasingly confident to allow others, from inside and outside the school, to influence and lead aspects of the school's work. It is particularly pleasing to see how well and quickly your new deputy headteacher has settled and the clarity with which she speaks of the issues facing the school. The senior leadership team, which also includes the assistant headteacher and inclusion manager, is becoming well-established.

The time has now come to begin to delegate more leadership responsibility to the staff as a whole. For good reasons, you have, until now, provided the staff with clear direction about how they should teach. You have, for the most part, checked carefully that the approaches you require are followed. This has brought improvement. Teaching is clearly better than it was, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils' behaviour is well managed. Lessons have clearly defined purposes. However, we agreed that, at this stage, lessons can be a little 'sterile' or formulaic. There is room for improvement sometimes in teachers' questioning and the pace of some lessons. Not all subjects are fully established. To continue to bring improvement, a new tack is needed: one which allows staff to make more decisions, be more creative and expect to take more responsibility, within a rigorous framework.

We considered together, therefore, the value that would come from developing teachers in their roles as leaders, each accountable for a subject or aspect of the life of the school. We discussed how, for the next year or so, staff should be expected to develop their expertise in their subjects or aspects, through training, engaging with subject associations and reading periodicals, for example. They should also undertake together training in middle leadership and work to improve their subjects. During the second year, they should be expected to establish clear, progressive, frameworks or schemes of work for their subjects or areas to supplant what now exists. The local authority has agreed to support this process which has potentially clear and liberating benefits. It will also allow you to focus more on your key strategic and operational roles.

The development of subject leadership, as outlined above, should be considered for inclusion in this year's performance management targets for staff. The process you have for performance management is appropriate. It is suitably linked to the school improvement plan, which is, in turn, a much better focused working document. This contains sections on curriculum and leadership development but will need some revision and addition to reflect our discussions.

I was pleased to see the results of national assessments in English, phonics (linking letters and sounds) and mathematics for 2014, throughout the school. In most respects, pupils attained well and made at least sound progress, which reflects the improving teaching and the abilities of the pupils involved. It is unlikely, however, that these results will be fully sustained in 2015. The current Year 6, for example, did not achieve as well in Year 5 as they might have done and some of the pupils in this year group started from lower baselines. It is clearly important that expectations of all pupils remain high and that their progress is carefully tracked.

You spend the money allocated to the school through the pupil premium appropriately and are considering sensibly some new approaches too. There is often a gap between the achievement of pupils entitled to the support of this funding and their classmates, but this gap is not very wide. Nevertheless, it is important to redouble the efforts to remove it altogether.

It is good to note interesting work going on, for example, in computing and physical education (in the latter case supported by a teacher jointly employed by the local Church secondary school). I was pleased to see that the school is developing learning outdoors and is involved in the BBC's *Ten Pieces* classical music initiative. We discussed ways of sustaining the momentum in both. There is nevertheless much more to do to develop more depth and rigour in the foundation subjects. Hence, the importance of developing subject leadership. We also considered together how it might be possible to talk to small groups of pupils from each class regularly to check

their learning across all the subjects, alongside the regular progress meetings which focus on English and mathematics.

The governing body has improved its work thoughtfully. Like you, it has had much to consider in the past year and has carried out its duties carefully and with commitment. It has been able to recruit and train new governors with valuable expertise. Processes towards becoming an academy are suitably managed. Working with you, governors uphold the school's Christian foundation determinedly. Members visit the school often; these visits could be streamlined to focus principally on the key aspects of the school improvement plan. Governors ask suitably challenging questions of you and senior leaders, and these are helpfully recorded in their meeting minutes.

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 provides very useful and consistent advisory support to the school. For example, the assigned adviser has supported you helpfully in making your accurate self-evaluation of the school and the quality of teaching. It is good, therefore, that the local authority will continue to advise the school after it becomes an academy.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Corporate Director of Education, Learning and Skills for Kent and the Diocese of Rochester.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector