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Mrs Wendy McKinnon
Acting Headteacher
St Andrew's CofE Primary School
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Dear Mrs McKinnon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Andrew's CofE Primary School, Warrington

Following my visit to your school on 14 November 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 September 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:

- further refine the school action plan by providing greater clarity about how actions will be monitored and giving specific detail of what success will look like for each action.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils, members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a national leader of education to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised a selection of documentation provided by the school. I took the opportunity to tour the school to observe learning and looked at pupils' work in their classrooms and in a sample of their work books. I also read minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

An experienced deputy headteacher was seconded to the school two weeks prior to the section 5 inspection. One teacher has left the school since the inspection; this vacancy has been filled following an internal reorganisation of staff. Two experienced governors have been appointed in order to fill vacancies on the governing body.

Main findings

The acting headteacher, with the support of other leaders and governors, has taken swift action to raise standards and accelerate pupils' progress by improving the quality of teaching.

The school action plan is well thought out and identifies appropriate actions to address the main areas of improvement. However, the distinction between how actions will be monitored and how their effectiveness will be evaluated is unclear. Consequently, there is uncertainty as to what success will look like for each action.

Actions to improve reading are beginning to show the green shoots of success. Leaders use pupil progress meetings to identify precisely, gaps in pupils' reading skills. This is then communicated to teachers who find it helpful in planning their teaching so they can find ways to close any apparent gaps in pupil's learning. Pupils read more often than they did prior to the last inspection and those spoken with say that they are enjoying reading more interesting texts. Pupils in Key Stage 1 were observed matching letters and sounds accurately in a range of contexts during their lessons.

Leaders have taken incisive action to improve writing throughout the school. The acting deputy headteacher has modelled the planning for and delivery of writing lessons to teachers. Every lesson now has a planned writing focus. Writing has been brought to life, for example by a visit from 'Percy the park keeper', the search for an enormous dinosaur egg and a video of space exploration. As a result there is a noticeable improvement in both the quantity and quality of writing in pupils' work books.

Teachers have improved their planning for lessons. The school's own records show that the most able pupils are now challenged more often to think more deeply and extend their learning. Teachers set additional 'booster' tasks for the most able pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils said they are given extra questions on fractions at the end of mathematics lessons and that they are expected to find things out for themselves in science. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this focussed approach on increasing the rate of progress of the most able pupils.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is not yet contributing effectively to increasing the rate of progress of all pupils in the school in all subjects. Scrutiny of pupils' work books showed that teachers' marking of pupils' writing sets high expectations in terms of accuracy, presentation and quality. However, teachers' marking in mathematics books frequently misses opportunities to extend learning by setting mathematical problems for pupils to solve. Consequently, the rate at which pupils progress across all subjects is patchy.

Leaders have acted quickly and effectively to provide further training for middle leaders in order to strengthen leadership throughout the school. Leaders' own records show that the quality of the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) has improved following feedback to teachers from the Key Stage 1 leader. For example, Children in Year 2 were able to read texts to me, including their own writing and were also able to sound out letters to make words that were complex. Middle leaders are becoming effective in improving the quality of teaching across the school.

Governors, as reported at the previous inspection, continue to be effective in supporting the school to improve. Recent minutes of meetings show that governors leave no stone unturned in order that they have a clear and accurate picture of the rate of progress being made by the 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

Leaders have made effective use of the support offered by the local authority, especially in identifying key actions to improve the school. Additional support from the local authority has been in the form of quality assurance visits. In these visits leaders are held to account about the effectiveness of their actions by local authority representative. Reports written by the local authority representative, following his quality assurance visits, have contributed to ensuring governors stay focussed on moving the school forward. The local authority has brokered the support of national leader of governance in order to bolster the schools capacity to improve. Leaders have also established a link with another good school in order to allow leaders, teachers and teaching assistants to observe and share good practice.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Warrington.

Yours sincerely

Drew Crawshaw

Her Majesty's Inspector