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Miss Alice Brown
Headteacher
St Mary's CofE Primary School
Lansdown View
Timsbury
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Dear Miss Brown

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

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 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 third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Senior leaders and governors are continuing to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, four governors, including both the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring inspection. The inspector also met with a group of pupils and looked at their workbooks. In addition, the inspector took account of 42 responses to the online Parent View survey.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school and a teaching assistant will leave at the end of term. The school has appointed two teachers, one of whom is working on a part-time basis.

The governing body has elected a new Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body

Main findings

Since the inspection, the school's leaders have taken strong action to improve the quality of teaching in order to raise pupils' standards. There has been an appropriate focus on ensuring a much greater consistency of high quality teaching across the school. This approach has taken time to implement as it has involved some restructuring of staff. As a result, the impact on improving pupils' standards has yet to be fully established across the school.

However, the school's work to improve the quality of teaching is proving successful in some year groups. For example, in 2014, the proportion of children in the Reception Year achieving a good level of development increased to be in line with the national average. The quality of phonics teaching has also improved. As a result, the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in 2014 is higher than was the case in 2013. Boys did exceptionally well, as they all achieved this outcome. In comparison, two thirds of the Year 1 girls reached the expected standard.

In 2014, the attainment of Year 2 pupils was broadly in line with the national average, but slightly lower than was achieved in the previous year. There is little difference between the standards achieved by both girls and boys. However, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs was not as high as the school had expected.

The 2014 Key Stage 2 results show an improvement on the previous year's figures. As a result, Year 6 pupils' attainment improved on the 2013 results to be in line with the national average. Year 6 girls reached standards higher than average in all subjects. In comparison, boys' results show them to be behind girls for English grammar, punctuation and spelling. The 2014 results also show that disadvantaged pupils' attainment was lower than that of other pupils at the school. Pupils with special educational needs did not achieve as highly as the school had expected.

To strengthen the school's efforts to raise standards, the staff have reviewed subject leaders' roles and responsibilities. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement in their respective subjects. As a result, the school has identified writing as a key priority for improvement. The subject leader for English is leading the

introduction of various initiatives to improve pupils' writing skills. Pupils' books shows that the quality of their handwriting and presentation is improving.

The senior leaders have focused on strengthening the quality of marking. As part of their responsibilities, subject leaders monitor teachers' marking by scrutinising pupils' workbooks. This strategy has been applied consistently since the marking policy was reviewed. As a result, teachers provide written feedback to pupils about how to improve their work. Pupils enjoy reading and acting upon their teacher's comments and writing responses in reply.

Teachers assess pupils' work regularly so that they can monitor pupils' progress and evaluate the level at which they are working. At the end of the last academic year, the headteacher recognised that teachers' assessments of pupils' achievement were too generous and not supported by work in the pupils' books. This led to a thorough review of the school's assessment practices and involved staff in checking each other's judgements. Having completed this exercise, the headteacher and other senior leaders are confident that the assessment of pupils' achievement is now accurate. The information gathered is being used to set appropriately challenging targets for pupils' progress, which can be used as part of the school's performance management arrangements.

The governing body has supported the school's senior leaders to manage the recent staff changes. They are confident that the school is well placed to build on the new arrangements so that pupils' achievement can improve rapidly. The governors describe the headteacher's reports as being very detailed and informative and a very useful mechanism for informing the governors about the school's progress. Following the inspection, the governors acted on the headteacher's suggestion to commission an external review of governance, which has been completed. The governors have prepared an action plan, which sets out how they will increase their capacity to hold the school to account. The governors are also reviewing the school's website to ensure that it complies with the government's expectations of what schools should publish.

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 is continuing to work closely with the senior leaders to strengthen the quality of leadership and management. The local authority adviser has arranged for educational consultants to work with and coach staff, which is proving beneficial as the quality of teaching across the school is improving.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Bath and North East Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector