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Mandy Staiano and Angela Wallis
Headteachers
St Catherine's Hoddesdon CofE Primary School
Haslewood Avenue
Hoddesdon
EN11 8HT

Dear Mrs Staiano and Mrs Wallis

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

Following my visit to your school on 4 December 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- improve the action plan by ensuring that:
 - a named individual is responsible for each action
 - deadlines are realistic
 - there is an increased sense of urgency
 - monitoring arrangements are clear and thorough

- identify all more-able pupils and improve teaching so that these pupils make good progress and attain the higher levels that they are capable of

- ensure that there is an increased sense of urgency to improving teaching and raising standards
- address the points for development raised in the recent review of governance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the acting senior teacher and the numeracy subject leader to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with three members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority. You took me on a tour of the school and I looked at a sample of pupils' books. The school improvement plan was evaluated and I looked at a number of other school documents. I checked the school's single central register.

Context

There were two teaching vacancies at the time of the last inspection and two other teachers left at the end of the summer term. Two newly-qualified teachers, an Early Years leader and a Special Needs Coordinator joined the school in September. One member of the senior leadership team is currently on maternity leave and other colleagues are acting in middle and senior leadership roles, in her absence. One governor has left since the last inspection and a new member has joined the governing body.

Main findings

The school's plan includes all the areas for improvement from the last inspection. It includes a range of appropriate actions, and milestones are set at termly intervals. However, deadlines for completion of activities are unrealistically short in some cases and far too long in others. Responsibility for carrying out specific actions is unclear because it is shared amongst teams rather than distributed to named individuals. The action plan is not yet leading to rapid improvement because it does not have a sufficient sense of urgency and the most pressing issues are not being addressed quickly enough. For example, little has been done to improve the progress of the most-able pupils since the last inspection.

You are now using teachers' performance management in a more focused way to improve teaching. All teachers have been given a target based on pupils' achievement. However, these targets are too generic and are not sufficiently sharply focused on the school's key areas for improvement.

Local authority advisors are currently working with individual teachers to improve the overall quality of teaching. They are also working with subject leaders to improve

their capacity to lead their subjects effectively and, as a result, actions plans are now in place. Training has been provided for staff on the effective use of questioning in the classroom and you told me that you were able see improvements in this area when observing lessons. In-house training was also provided on challenging more-able pupils and you told me that this has not been as successful and you did not see any real impact from this when observing lessons. You have increased the focus on spelling, grammar and punctuation in lessons and teachers are now required to tackle pupils' errors as they arise. Sampling of pupils' books shows that some teachers are doing this routinely but others are not.

The school's marking policy has been re-written and shared with staff. This process was not carried out quickly enough and the policy was only ratified by the governing body earlier this week. You told me that it is now a 'non-negotiable' requirement that pupils are always given time to respond to teachers' marking. The pupils' books that I sampled showed that, while some marking and pupil response is regular and of good quality, the practice is not yet consistent in all classes.

A review of governance was carried out in October and a number of areas for improvement were raised. Governors said that they feel that they are 'a more coherent group' as a result of the review. There now needs to be a greater sense of urgency in addressing the issues from the review in a timely manner.

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 quality of support and challenge provided by the local authority is good. The new improvement partner has got to know the school well and the direct involvement of the District School Effectiveness Adviser illustrates the local authority's commitment to ensuring the school improves quickly. The number of improvement partner visits has been doubled to ensure that the school is monitored closely and that the necessary support is provided. The school is benefiting from the input of specialist teaching and learning advisers, provided by the local authority.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Varney
Her Majesty's Inspector