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Mrs Lesley Alcorn and Mrs Sally Godden
Headteachers
St Leonard's Church of England Primary School
Overthorpe Road
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX16 4SB

Dear Mrs Alcorn and Mrs Godden

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Leonard's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 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 October 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 ensure that:

- there are rigorous systems for monitoring the school's work and tackling weaknesses
- there are clear plans in place to develop governance, senior and middle leadership.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with you, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We walked around school to see classes at work. I evaluated the school's action plans and looked at other key documents.

Main findings

It is clear that the findings of the recent inspection were not a surprise to you, your middle leaders or governors. You knew last term that standards at the end of Year 6 would be lower than in recent years and that teaching was not consistently good across the school. You acknowledge that systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement need to be more rigorous and that any weaknesses must be tackled more quickly and robustly in future.

The action plans for this school year have been reviewed to ensure that they are closely linked to the areas needing improvement identified by the inspection. It is clear what the school intends to do to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. You are expecting more of middle leaders and governors, but the plans for developing their leadership skills and effectiveness are not yet clear enough. Most plans now identify what the impact of activities will be at key points during the year. This should help the school to keep a check on improvement more easily. It would be better still if staff leading activities were not monitoring implementation as well. Your targets for pupils' achievement by July 2015 will be your key measure of success at the end of the year. The targets are not, however, always sufficiently ambitious to ensure that St Leonard's becomes a good school again. Other success criteria are not always focused on improving quality or easy to measure. The overall planner, which maps all activities on a month-by-month basis, is helping to avoid slippage and overload. It would be useful to include costs, time and money, to check that the plan is affordable.

There is a greater sense of urgency to the work to improve teaching and pupils' achievement following the inspection. You have introduced a common format for planning lessons to ensure teachers set work for pupils of different abilities. It is important you check, through monitoring, that activities take account of assessments of pupils' knowledge and skills so that there is sufficient challenge. You have reminded staff how you expect them to mark books and give feedback to help pupils improve their work, sharing examples of good practice. You acknowledge that there is more to be done to make sure that marking is both effective and manageable. Staff need to be clear that marking is part of teaching, helping them to identify what pupils should learn next, not an add-on. You are considering whether it would be more effective to mark work in detail less frequently to ensure that it is done well. This is appropriate if staff consistently check what pupils understand during lessons and use the information to plan what they teach next. Between you, you have monitored teaching in most classes since the inspection, by observing lessons and looking at pupils' work. Staff have been given feedback which identifies strengths and points for improvement. The observations and feedback do not, however, always focus enough on what pupils are learning or the progress they are making. Taking account of assessments of pupils' learning over time will complete the picture of the quality of teaching.

You are analysing information about pupils' achievement in more detail. Importantly, the analysis looks at groups of pupils who have not achieved as well as others in the past and those eligible for pupil premium funding, as well as each class. Pupils who are not doing as well as they should have been identified for extra support. Staff know they should be challenging the most-able pupils more.

Middle leaders are more aware, through their involvement in discussions about the school's action plans, of what needs to be done to improve teaching and raise achievement. They are clearer what is expected of them. Insufficient attention has been paid, however, to what training they need, as a team or individuals, to be effective leaders. Arrangements for leadership meetings and time for middle leaders to support and monitor staff are too loose to ensure they happen regularly.

A handful of governors do their best to monitor the school's work and hold senior leaders to account, but too many do not. Attendance at governing body meetings is low. Despite the fact that the inspection identified governors do not sufficiently understand data about pupils' achievement, only four attended recent training. The review of governance is planned for early January. It is crucial that the findings are acted on swiftly and that a separate action plan to improve governance is put in place as a matter of priority. Governors need to be clear how and when they will monitor the progress and evaluate the impact of action plans.

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 identified, through its annual analysis of data earlier this term, that the school was likely to require improvement. As a result, it began supporting the school prior to the inspection. To date, this has mainly been to help leaders review the action plans. A review of pupils' progress this term will take place before Christmas. The focus of further support will be confirmed following that visit. It is important that it is agreed as soon as possible so as not to lose momentum. The findings of this inspection suggest that support would be best used to help develop leadership at all levels and to regularly challenge you to show that the school is improving. You may also find it helpful to link with a school with a good track record of improvement and effective monitoring systems.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector