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Abigail Huggins
St Andrew's Benn CofE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School
Chester Street
Rugby
CV21 3NX

Dear Miss Huggins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Andrew's Benn CofE (Voluntary Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 March, 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 November 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- streamline the multiple layers of action planning, so that priorities identified in the short, medium and long term are aligned
- include relevant measures in plans, by which you and governors will be able to assess the rate of school improvement
- ensure leaders are able to prioritise frequent and rigorous monitoring, in order that actions have immediate and lasting impact on pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and other members of the governing body, including the Chair, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan and other action plans were evaluated. Short visits were made to classrooms to look at pupils' learning and examine the work in their books. A number of documents was scrutinised, including records relating to the quality of teaching, pupil's achievement and rates of attendance.

Main findings

You and other leaders have a clear understanding of the urgency with which the school needs to improve and show determination to make it happen. You and your deputy headteacher have identified the correct actions to take and show you can accurately judge whether actions have made a difference to pupils' learning. You have provided relevant training for teachers and offered coaching to help them improve the quality of their marking. Teachers have visited other schools to observe effective teaching. Nevertheless, these actions have not made enough difference. While some pupils are making better progress, achievement has not improved well enough for many.

Improvements in pupils' achievement are erratic because the quality of teaching remains highly variable. Some teachers lack the necessary skills to set work at the right level for pupils, so tasks are often too easy or too hard. Some teachers now expect pupils to work much harder and to produce work of good quality. This is not so in all classes. Some still accept small amounts of work and work that is untidy, which shows pupils have not focused enough on their learning. Pupils' books show that some teachers do not keep a close-enough check on how hard pupils are working in lessons, or whether they are finding the work challenging enough. Consequently, learning time is often wasted because some pupils spend too long repeating what they can already do, while others are left to struggle alone with tasks that are too demanding.

Most teachers are trying hard to mark pupils' work in accordance with the agreed policy and to follow the guidance you have given. This is having very mixed results. Some teachers now use marking well to guide pupils in making improvements in their writing and mathematics work. However, some teachers are struggling to do this effectively because they are less skilled at identifying precisely what it is that needs to improve. As a result, advice given to some pupils is not helpful and leads to little improvement. Some pupils' books demonstrate that a few teachers are sufficiently skilled at using marking effectively, but do not do so often enough to make a real difference to pupils' progress.

You have established clear expectations about how you will judge whether teaching is good enough and you give helpful advice to teachers to support them in meeting these standards. Nevertheless, these expectations are not being met by all teachers. This has happened because you have not checked closely enough whether teachers are following this guidance or acting on the advice they have been given. While you and other leaders have carried out some checks on the quality of teaching, these have been too few and far between. Consequently, even though you show teachers what needs to improve, you have been unaware that some have not made the necessary changes. One reason why you have not given sufficient priority to such monitoring activities, is that some of the school's systems and processes are overly time consuming and can take up too much of your time.

One such system is the approach to creating action plans. Your current plan is too complicated. The layers of long, medium and short-term planning do not provide a coherent set of steps to achieve the rapid improvement that is necessary. This is because each tier of planning focuses on slightly different priorities and does not show precisely what will be achieved by when. This lack of measures to assess proposed improvement at key points over the coming months means that you and your governors are not in a position to judge whether actions are having sufficient impact on pupils' achievement. This is another reason why the rate of improvement has been too slow.

The governing body supports you well and has taken steps to help you achieve a stable level of staffing. Governors are aware of the challenges you face and of how quickly these need to be overcome. You provide governors with helpful information about pupils' achievement, which they use well to challenge you about the school's performance. Governors now check things out for themselves more frequently, such as by joining you in monitoring activities. However, communication mechanisms between school leaders and governors are not sharply defined. This sometimes results in your time not being used efficiently.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. At this visit, it was agreed that school leaders will attend HMI-led professional development activities to support aspects of monitoring and evaluation.

External support

Since the section 5 inspection, the local authority has deployed a learning improvement officer to oversee improvement. His visits to the school keep him reasonably well informed about the progress being made, but the lack of key improvement measures in your action plans make it difficult to form a precise view about the rate of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Warwickshire and the Diocese of Coventry.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Director of Children's Services for Warwickshire
- Diocese

