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Jonathan Brough
Headteacher
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Worthen
Shrewsbury
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Dear Mr Brough

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Worthen CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 March 2015, 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.

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:

- refine the school action plan to clearly identify the training needs of teachers in order to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
- ensure that the plan includes measurable success criteria and milestones against which the impact of actions can be checked by leaders and governors, with targets specified for raising the achievement of different groups of pupils, such as boys and disadvantaged pupils
- accelerate the progress of Year 6 pupils in writing by embedding recent training and initiatives
- secure long-term arrangements for replacing the current headteacher, who is leaving to take up a post elsewhere at the end of this term.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, three teachers and representatives from the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met with the Education Improvement Advisor from Shropshire local authority. The school action plan was evaluated. I undertook brief visits to a number of lessons accompanied by the headteacher and looked at examples of pupils' work. A range of the school's documents and records were also examined.

Context

Since the previous inspection, two governors have resigned from the governing body. The headteacher leaves his post in Easter. A substantive replacement has not been appointed. An executive headteacher, the current headteacher of Hope Church of England Primary School, will oversee the running of the school as an interim arrangement. Governors are currently seeking formal partnership through federation with another school.

Main findings

The headteacher and governors are well-focused on making the necessary improvements to become a good school.

The school action plan addresses the areas for improvement that were identified in the previous inspection, but some success criteria or targets are too broad-reaching and vague. This is particularly the case for those relating to how the quality of teaching will be improved. These should be refined so that they are more sharply measurable, with milestones offered in order that leaders and governors can be sure that leaders are on-track to be successful in their actions. In some cases, the person who is leading an action also monitors it. This also needs changing so that teachers and leaders are made accountable for bringing about improvements. The plan also needs to show more clearly how leaders will measure the achievement of different groups of pupils so that they can be sure that gaps in pupils' achievement are closing, such as the differences in the progress and attainment of boys and girls in writing.

Some actions in the plan do not state what needs to be done in terms of training for teachers in order to make improvements. For example, it is not clear how teachers will be equipped with the skills they need if they are help the most able pupils in the school make quicker progress than they have done in the past.

Recent training for teachers has never-the-less focused on some of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. For example, a teacher has attended training on how to raise standards and expectations in reading and writing. This has given teachers a greater awareness of what needs to be done to improve pupils' writing in

the school. A new performance management system has been implemented that links teacher's performance closely to the professional Teachers' Standards.

Leaders' monitoring of teaching and of pupils' work is improving and more systematic, but is still not frequent enough, nor has been sustained for long enough to have yet had a significant impact on standards. During my short visits to lessons, this was evident in some inconsistencies in both the quality of teaching and in the quality of marking between classes. Sometimes the guidance that teachers offer to pupils in their written comments is too vague to be helpful. Pupils are not always given opportunities to practise the spelling errors that are picked out in their work or to make improvements. However, I also saw some excellent examples of marking, with teachers ensuring that their marking and comments focused on developing pupils' skills and had an impact on pupils' learning. Marking in mathematics is showing some improvements.

I saw some examples of teachers skilfully questioning pupils to challenge them to think more deeply. Teachers also set tasks that captured the interest of pupils so that they were very engaged in their learning. I also saw some teachers adapting tasks, resources and the levels of support they offered to pupils so that the activities were well matched to meet the needs of different pupils. This helped pupils to make progress. Sometimes questioning is not used well enough to check that learning is secure before pupils attempt tasks. This means that pupils make slower progress because they do not always fully understand what they need to do in order to succeed.

There have been some improvements in assessment practices. Leaders have introduced 'skills ladders' and are making greater use of national guidance to better track pupils progression in their mathematical, reading and writing skills across the school. It is too early to gauge the impact of these developments. Some teachers have also attended training where their assessments of pupils' work are standardised alongside other schools so that they can be sure that the marks that they award are accurate. This process now needs to be more systematic and these checks made on a regular basis so that the governors can be assured that the information that they receive about pupils' achievement is robust.

The work of governors is improving. An external review of governance took place in January. The outcomes of this have enabled governors to generate an action plan to improve their skills. They have formed a 'strategic monitoring group' that meets regularly to check on the progress leaders have made in implementing the school action plan and the impact these actions have had. They have also attended training that has strengthened their awareness of the role that governors have in the strategic leadership of the school; further training will take place in the near future to improve their understanding of school performance data. Governors are increasingly aware of the need to have an overview of teachers' performance linked to decisions about pay progression in order to bring about school improvements. They have also visited the school to look for themselves at how some areas of the

school improvement plan are progressing. As a result, governors are increasingly confident in being able to challenge leaders and hold them to account for delivering improvements.

When I looked at some information about the current progress of pupils in the school, this showed a broadly positive picture for the achievement of current Year 6 pupils. However, too few pupils are currently making better than expected progress in writing. This means that the school is not yet on-track to secure good progress for pupils in writing. This needs tackling as a matter of urgency.

The interim headteacher, who takes up post in the summer term, has a proven track record of delivering successful school improvements. Governors and the local authority are confident the school will make rapid improvements under these arrangements. However, governors need to ensure that they secure a long-term solution for replacing the headteacher.

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 has now increased the level of support offered to the school. The local authority Education Improvement Advisor has a very clear understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need to be further development. This has enabled effective support to be offered to the headteacher, governors and teachers. This work has included undertaking monitoring activities during visits to the school and providing access to relevant training opportunities for teachers. The Education Improvement Advisor also attends governors' strategic monitoring group meetings in order to support governors in checking the impact of the school action plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Appropriate authority
- Local authority