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24 April 2015

Mrs Maggie Cole  
Headteacher  
St Thomas's CofE Primary School  
Kendal Green  
Kendal  
Cumbria  
LA9 5PP

Dear Mrs Cole

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Thomas's CofE Primary School, Cumbria**

Following my visit to your school on 23 April 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:

- establish a monitoring cycle that identifies clearly the schedule and focus for monitoring and then draws together all the resulting information concisely in order to inform next steps
- develop governors' engagement with parents and make sure parents are aware of the progress being made in school.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection I met with you and the assistant headteacher, subject leaders, special needs and pastoral leaders, a group of pupils, the administrative manager and the Chair of the Governing Body together with two governors. I had a telephone discussion -with the local authority senior adviser who has been supporting the

school. I visited all classrooms, sampled pupils' work and talked to pupils during break-times and while they were working. I looked at school documentation including its action plan, Governing Body minutes and reports, pupil progress tracking, and external and internal monitoring.

## **Main findings**

You have acted quickly to tackle the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. You are leading improvements effectively, with the support of a cohesive and highly committed staff team. As one middle leader said, 'everyone has accepted that changes need to happen and we all feel part of it.' The implementation of the action plan is progressing well. The plan is strong and it clearly identifies actions, expected outcomes and the responsibilities of all staff. Actions are set within a realistic timescale to bring about rapid improvement.

The main focus up to now has been on improving teaching in mathematics. The new leader of mathematics is leading changes in assessment and planning successfully. The revisions to planning are ensuring that pupils are taught at a more rapid pace and that teachers attend to the varied learning needs of different ability groups within each class. Teachers are assessing pupils' work more carefully so that any misunderstanding is addressed quickly and pupils are given work that is suitably challenging.

Your revisions to the marking policy are having a positive impact on pupils' learning, especially in mathematics. Marking is providing clearer advice to pupils on how they can improve their work. The best examples provide pupils with additional challenge and support to extend their knowledge and skills. The 'designated improvement and reflection time' is popular with pupils and is proving successful. Marking is not yet as well developed in writing and other subjects as it is in mathematics, and is rightly an ongoing priority.

The more focused approach to planning, assessment and marking is beginning to quicken the pace of pupils' learning. The school's progress tracking data show that most pupils are making expected progress in mathematics in each year group and a greater proportion are making better-than-expected progress than has been the case previously. Progress in reading and writing has quickened too.

You are tracking the progress of different groups of pupils more carefully. The pupil progress meetings, between leaders and class teachers each term have raised expectations of what pupils of all ability should achieve. This is especially the case for the most able pupils, who are now being given more challenging work. Pupils who are not making enough progress are identified and supported to catch up. Teachers are making sure that disadvantaged pupils who are not making expected progress receive targeted support in class or small groups. As a result, the gaps between disadvantaged and other pupils in school are closing.

Improving the processes to check the impact of teaching on learning was identified as an area requiring improvement at the last inspection. Your most recent lesson observations identify strengths and weaknesses seen in lessons well and there is more of a focus on pupils' response. However, there is still a tendency to describe what the teacher is doing and note down what pupils do as a result, rather than to evaluate the impact of teaching over time. Your records from work scrutiny provide a fuller picture of pupils' progress and of the breadth and relevance of the curriculum. It would be helpful to bring these records together when evaluating the overall impact of teaching, indicating, for example, whether pupils are working at or above the age-related expectations described in the national curriculum and whether work is matched to learning needs.

There are currently several different sources of evidence used to evaluate the impact of your planned work to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes. The records are useful and provide an accurate view of current performance, but information is not organised as effectively as it could be. It would be helpful to establish a cycle of monitoring and evaluation that identifies the focus for monitoring and succinctly summarises information from the various evidence sources.

You are taking effective action to develop the skills of subject leaders and those responsible for leading special educational needs and pastoral support. They are benefitting from training and opportunities to work alongside senior leaders in school and colleagues from other schools. Middle leaders are extremely positive about the changes taking place and are contributing to improvement effectively.

At the time of the last inspection there had been several recent changes to the Governing Body. Roles and responsibilities are now clearly established and the experienced and knowledgeable Chair is leading developments effectively. The recent audit of skills and the new committee structure are ensuring that governors are able to use their skills to best effect. Governors have participated in training so that they have a better understanding of data and a clearer view of the progress pupils make across the school.

Pupils who spoke with me were very positive about their school. They feel safe and happy to come to school. They said work 'has the right level of challenge' and 'teachers are kind and helpful'. Pupils are well-behaved in lessons and considerate towards each other in shared areas, including outdoors. Parents who had responded to Parent View, the online Ofsted questionnaire, were mostly positive. The overwhelming majority say their child feels safe, is happy, is taught well and is well looked after. However a number of parents say they do not know how well the school is led and managed and a small minority say the school does not respond well to concerns they raise. There is, therefore, a need to improve communication with parents so that they are more aware of the progress being made in school. Governors could usefully support this.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The school has drawn on external support effectively. It had only just begun to receive targeted support from the local authority at the time of the last inspection, so impact was limited at that time. The support is having more of an impact now. The 'Strategic Improvement Meeting Group' is checking that improvement plans are progressing as intended and support is provided where necessary. The senior adviser is providing helpful support to the school. The local authority is also brokering support from outstanding schools, including for example, support from an outstanding mathematics teacher. The school is part of the Kendal Collaborative Partnership and teachers benefit from links with other local schools. They also benefit from the link with an outstanding school in Halifax.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

**Her Majesty's Inspector**