

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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Ms L Tatam
Headteacher
Mells Church of England First School
Mells Green
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Dear Ms Tatam

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Mells Church of England First School

Following my visit to your school on 16 January 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 September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Senior leaders, governors and the responsible authority 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:

- ensure that all staff follow the school's teaching policy so that pupils are enabled to produce the best work that they can
- review the school's action plan so that the governing body can regularly and robustly hold the school leaders and teachers to account using specific and measurable targets that focus on the planned actions that will lead to swift school improvement
- make sure that the pupil attainment and progress information already provided to the governing body is delivered more frequently and contains specific detail relating to the different groups of pupils

- ensure the governing body reviews all of the school's policies so that they reflect current guidance and meet statutory requirements. They must start with those policies relating to disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
- ensure that there is a trained special education needs coordinator in the school by 2016 and that a member of staff has begun training at the earliest opportunity
- ensure the planned review of the school's use of pupil premium funding takes place. Any actions recommended following the review must be rapidly implemented
- all those with leadership responsibilities have more opportunities to see best practice, and have continued external specialist support
- ensure that more staff have safeguarding training at the higher level so that they can deputise when the leader for safeguarding is absent from the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and representatives from the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. In addition, a telephone conversation was conducted with a representative from the local authority. The schools' action plan was evaluated. The headteacher's report to the governing body, notes of visits from the external literacy support consultant, the single central record, a selection of pupils writing books, the school's current information about pupils' achievement, the governing body minutes and school policies were inspected.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection the senior who is the special education needs coordinator and also the designated child protection leader remains absent due to illness. One part-time teacher and a teaching assistant has left the school. Two full-time supply teachers have joined the school on a temporary basis.

Main findings

Instability in staffing has left the school with severely limited leadership capacity to strategically drive school improvement. The absence of the senior teacher and the lack of another member of staff trained as the designated child protection leader meant that the school did not have a suitably trained member of staff to lead on safeguarding. The governing body has currently arranged that the safeguarding leader for Mells Nursery School, that shares the same site, will act as the designated child protection leader for the school.

An action plan has been drawn up that highlights the tasks that need to be completed and by when. However, it is too broad and unwieldy for the headteacher

and the governing body to use to help them easily check the progress that the school is making in 'getting to good'. The headteacher provides termly information about pupils' attainment and progress to the governing body. However, this is not shared frequently enough and lacks the specific detail necessary for the governors to understand the progress of different groups of pupils. For example by ability, for disadvantaged pupils, by gender, and for pupils that join the school at different times of the year. This will enable governors and school leaders to identify early any slippage in the progress that these pupils are making.

It has taken far too long to organise the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding. The delay has reduced the capacity of the governing body to ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duties. As a result, the school's website does not meet current government requirements. The published information about the spending of the pupil premium is insufficient. There is no indication of the impact on the achievement and increased health and wellbeing of the pupils supported by this additional funding. In addition, the reported policy for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is out of date. The report must comply with section 69(2) of the Children and Families Act 2014 regulation 51 and schedule 1 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014.

The quality and quantity of pupils' writing continues to vary too much. From the work seen in pupils' books it is evident that some teachers are not challenging pupils to do their best. In some year groups, there is clear evidence that writing has improved. Some teachers do not mark pupils' work frequently or well enough so that pupils know what they need to do to improve. In addition, these teachers do not consistently follow the school's teaching and assessment policies, for example using 'traffic lights' as colour code for pupils to share with the teacher how hard, or easy they found the work set for them.

Pupils' progress suffers where teachers are prepared to accept scruffy and poorly presented work. When teachers have high expectations about what pupils can achieve and how they should present their work, pupils eagerly respond and demonstrate that they are capable of better quality work. For example, in one of the books seen, the pupil initially wrote very little in printed letters, often in an untidy manner and with little care for grammar, spelling or punctuation. Following a change of teacher they responded well to the marking and guidance given and began to write extensively with a joined up cursive script, including improved grammar, spelling and punctuation. Their current work exhibits a significantly higher ability and attainment than previously demonstrated which has been sustained over several months. Other, although less dramatic improvements were seen in other pupils' books where high standards are expected and reinforced.

I will carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has received support from a Local Leader of Education (LLE) to help improve the quality of pupils' writing. She is providing excellent support and guidance. In October the school leaders requested, and had, an external moderation of the current Year 4 pupils' standards in writing when they left Year 3. They were found not to be high enough. As a result, Year 4 pupils are now taught separately by the headteacher where they are making much better progress than previously. In subsequent visits the LLE is working her way through moderating the achievements of pupils in other groups and is suggesting how teachers can provide suitably challenging activities so that pupils make progress in line with their capabilities.

The external support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has begun more recently. She is providing appropriate advice and guidance whilst the school's special education needs coordinator is absent.

Whilst staffing remains unstable the school needs access to additional external support from the local authority to ensure that pupils make better progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector