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20 April 2015

Mrs A Shearer
St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Henstridge
Ash Walk
Henstridge
Somerset
BA8 0QD

Dear Mrs Shearer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Nicholas Church of England Primary School, Henstridge

Following my visit to your school on 20 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 December 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's improvement plans so that the governing body can quickly see the progress that the school is making in 'getting to good'. The plans need to have more measurable targets, with set milestones to better measure progress.
- make sure that the pupil attainment and progress information already provided to the governing body contains more specific detail relating to the different groups of pupils in the school so that they can more robustly hold staff to account
- ensure all staff act as good role models for writing to reinforce pupil's learning of letter formation, spelling and punctuation
- ensure that the school's website contains all the statutory required information.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the leader for mathematics and three members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. School information about pupils' progress and attainment were taken into account. All classes were visited during the inspection and a selection of pupils' mathematics and writing books were reviewed. The governing body minutes, documents relating to mathematics, English, and the external support provided to the school were also considered.

Main findings

The leaders of English and mathematics have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have visited a local outstanding school as part of the external support provided by a National Leader of Education (NLE) and are sharing best practice with partner teachers from that school. The leader for mathematics is very new to the role but is getting appropriate support, advice and professional development. In the recent past, the headteacher has been the main person monitoring the work in pupils' books. Time has now been allocated to enable both subject leaders to monitor pupils' work during lessons. The good partnership links with the local school has enhanced the understanding of these middle leaders of the need to be more rigorous in the way the school samples and monitors pupils' work in their books and assesses the progress that pupils make.

The English, mathematics and overarching school improvement plans do not have clear enough success criteria to evaluate the actions that need to be taken to drive school improvement. Currently, the timescales that indicate when the actions will be completed, or when interim judgements will be made are too imprecise. The plans do not enable the governing body to measure easily the progress that the school is making in 'getting to good'.

Following visits to the NLE's school the expectations of other teachers and teaching assistants have been raised. Following their return to St Nicholas School, staff reviewed the displays and learning materials used in their classrooms. As a result, classrooms were de-cluttered and now provide a more appropriate environment for pupils in which to learn. In addition, the school has invested in a greater range of practical resources for the teaching of mathematics, which is helping pupils in their mastery of mathematics.

The school has developed a set of 'pupil entitlements' called 'certainties'. These are based on the 'Teaching Standards' and are designed to help ensure that teaching is consistent throughout the school and is of a high quality. These 'certainties' describe what class teachers and the school will provide including the expected outcomes in raising pupils' achievement. The headteacher monitors the application of the 'certainties' and samples pupils' books on a weekly basis. She then uses this information to set weekly targets that are specific for each member of staff. As a result of this, and the external support provided by the NLE, teaching is improving steadily and securely. The school's information about pupils' achievement is carefully

and externally moderated. It shows that pupils' progress is also improving. However, inconsistencies remain and more needs to be done to ensure that all pupils achieve what they are capable of. For example, some staff do not always have good enough handwriting to demonstrate to pupils the correct way to form their letters. Some writing makes it hard for pupils to see the correct punctuation used or spelling of words.

Governors have been provided with more frequent and accurate information about the progress and attainment of pupils in the school. They are using this information to better challenge and hold staff to account for their work. To increase their knowledge further they need to be able to compare better the rates of achievement between the different groups of pupils throughout the school. Some governors have already visited the NLE's school and there are plans for them all to visit. Those who have visited have found the experience to be highly informative. It has allowed them to compare and contrast the differences between the two schools, seeing where improvements can be made to their school. These have already begun.

The school has improved its communication with parents and uses an appropriate range of ways including text and email. The school is in the process of updating its website. However, at this stage, the school does not make all the required information available to parents, carers and others on the website.

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 school is getting excellent external support. The local authority has funded the support from a NLE. There is a carefully worked out plan to identify where this support will be provided and what the impact should be. It is evident that by visiting, and working in partnership with the NLE's outstanding school the expectations of teachers and teaching assistants have been raised. This has already resulted in improving the amount of good teaching and learning. In addition, through meetings and discussions with partnership teachers, subject leaders are getting high quality support and professional development opportunities. This is helping them, along with the guidance from the headteacher, to develop effectively their leadership skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector