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26 June 2015

Vickie Walker
Headteacher
St Martin's Primary School
Holly Bush Walk
Hereford
HR2 6AF

Dear Mrs Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Martin's Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 June 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 February 2015. 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 recent section 5 inspection. Plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- increase the pace of improvement
- ensure parents know the school's values and expectations
- find ways of working with parents to improve pupils' attendance
- sharpen the action plan and include attainment targets
- have higher expectations of pupils when marking their work
- ensure pupils know what they need to do to be successful
- ensure all teaching is at least good and take rapid action where it is not
- agree a package of support with the local authority which should result in rapid improvement in pupils' progress.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I undertook a learning walk with you and spoke to pupils. I evaluated the school's action plan and examined pupils' books. I also analysed current attainment and attendance data and scrutinised notes of visits made by the local authority.

Context

Some uncertainty exists over the future leadership of the governing body. Although this has been resolved in the immediate future, leaders will be seeking support to find a new Chair of Governors in the near future.

Main findings

There have been some changes to the way leadership roles are organised. Responsibilities, such as monitoring different areas of the action plan, are now shared out more widely among members of the senior leadership team. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these changes. A new behaviour policy has been agreed with staff. Pupils and staff report that it is already making a difference. Leaders report that improvements to some pupils' behaviour still need to be made.

The action plan contains all the areas of improvement identified at the last inspection, apart from ensuring that parents clearly understand the school's values and expectations. You have already taken some action on some aspects of the plan, such as re-organising the support teaching to ensure pupils do not miss out on other learning. However, the plan is not sufficiently focussed on improving pupils' attainment, so that it is at least in line with the national proportions of pupils who attain the expected levels at the end of Years 2 and 6. Staff responsible for leading improvements are not identified on the action plan. There is a lack of sharp detail needed to bring about rapid improvements. For example, the strategy to develop the quality of teaching only refers to teachers' understanding of this and does not identify how this understanding will be developed. The local authority identified weaknesses in the action plan in early May 2015, but leaders have not made sufficient improvements to it since then. You explained that teaching is improving, but there are still a number of teaching improvements to be made.

The school's own assessment information for the current Year 2 pupils, suggests a mixed picture of attainment this year. The proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the expected level in reading and writing has declined and remains well below the 2014

national average. The proportion of Year 2 pupils reaching the expected level in mathematics has increased significantly this year, but still remains below the 2014 national average. No other confirmed 2015 assessment information was available at the time of this inspection visit.

Some improvements in pupils' progress in mathematics and writing and the feedback provided by teachers was evident in books. However, teachers do not yet have high enough expectations of pupils. Mathematics and writing books showed that some corrections had not been completed and some improvements contained punctuation errors which had not been identified. A piece of writing which contained unidentified spelling mistakes had been marked as 'excellent work'. Targets or assessment information were not seen in pupils' books. Teachers need to ensure that pupils are aware of how they can be successful, especially when writing.

Pupils' current attendance is below the attendance rate at the school in 2013-2014. Leaders explained that a chickenpox outbreak earlier this year has had an impact on the current attendance rate. It is important that leaders find a way of working with parents to improve pupil's attendance, which has been below the national average for at least the last three years.

A review of governance was undertaken before the last inspection. Governors have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school, but the future leadership of the Governing Body is uncertain. The current Chair of Governors is planning to step down, but at present, no other governors have come forward to take on this important role.

External support

The school has received two visits from a local authority school improvement advisor, had two meetings with a National Leader of Education and attended suggested training. Not all support suggested by the local authority has been accepted and you feel that not all arranged support has been useful. Additional external help, such as supporting the teaching of reading and writing, has been used but it is too early to measure the impact of this. The notes of visits from the local authority correctly state that there is insufficient evidence that the school is starting to make rapid progress towards securing a judgement of good or better at its next full Ofsted inspection.

The support offered by the local authority for the school since the last inspection has been clear and appropriate. The impact of this support so far is limited, as the school has chosen not to accept all of it. It is essential that the school and local authority can urgently agree on a package of support that should result in the rapid improvement in pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Bellworthy
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
cc. Local authority