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8 June 2015

Mr C Marshall  
Headteacher  
St John and St Francis Church School  
Westonzoyland Road  
Bridgwater  
TA6 5BP

Dear Mr Marshall

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St John and St Francis Church School**

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the sponsor are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to ensure that:

- all staff set work that is suitably challenging for all pupils so that they make at least good progress from their starting points, particularly the more able
- the development of middle leadership is sustained leading to increased pupils' achievement
- the vacancy for the Chair of the Governing Body is filled and that all governors play an active role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of planned actions to secure improvement
- staff model handwriting better for pupils when marking their work to reinforce pupils' learning of letter formation
- the work already started on preparing pupils for life in modern Britain is embedded in normal everyday practice.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, representatives of the Diocese of Bath and Wells Multi-Academy Trust (the sponsor) and a local leader of education (LLE) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. The inspector visited all classrooms during the inspection and reviewed a sample of pupils' books. The outcomes of external monitoring visits from representatives of the Department for Education (DfE), the sponsor and records relating to the impact of performance management of staff were considered.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection in March 2015, which judged the school to require improvement, significant changes have been made to the staffing structure of the school. Middle leadership and teaching assistant roles have been reassigned. The headteacher has been appointed to another school from September 2015. The school is in the process of appointing a new headteacher for January 2016. In the interim autumn term, the LLE working with the school is going to be seconded from her own school to be the acting headteacher at St John and St Francis Church School. The seconded deputy headteacher will be leaving the school this term to take up a headship post of her own from September 2015.

## **Main findings**

Senior leaders are taking the right actions to lead to school improvement. Pupils in all cohorts are making better progress since the section 5 inspection in March 2015. This is because leaders and managers have taken good note of the inspection findings and have acted swiftly to set about resolving the points for improvement. These are clearly defined on the school's improvement plan, which provides a good sense of direction for staff. However, the overarching plan does not sufficiently identify where and how the governing body will measure the school's progress. There is an acting Chair of the Governing Body. This post needs to be secured as a substantive position and to ensure that the governing body is not over-reliant on a few individuals to drive school improvement. Further training and support is needed for this to happen.

Senior, and increasingly, middle leaders are aware of inconsistencies that remain in the quality of teaching and that the levels of challenge for the more able pupils are still not high enough. However, current information about the progress that pupils are making shows that the current Year 6 are on track to attain close to the national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.

Improvements have also been made to the provision in the early years. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development is now close to that

seen nationally. The school has appointed two new members of staff to continue to lead and direct improvements from September 2015.

Middle leadership roles have been restructured to reflect better teachers' knowledge, understanding, interests and the amount that they are paid. As part of their professional development they have been working with colleagues from the Wessex Teaching School, developing their coaching and mentoring skills. Each middle leader has a performance management objective focused on raising pupils' achievement and ensuring that their subject area contributes effectively to pupils' understanding of English, mathematics and in preparing them for life in modern Britain. They have all created an action plan for their area of leadership that directly links into the whole-school development plan. While it is too early to judge the impact that these plans have had on improving pupils' achievements, the school rightly prioritised middle leadership as crucial to its development. Senior leaders and governors are fully aware that further training and support is needed for these staff.

Following consultation with teachers, the planning format for lessons has been adapted to ensure the assessment of what pupils know, understand and can do is more accurate and frequent. This assessment is now used to determine more effectively the progress that pupils are making, and inform future lesson plans. The redeployment of teaching assistants has required staff to rethink how best to use them to maximise the pupils' learning. Teaching assistants' support is now timetabled and planned weekly. This has improved teachers' ability to plan their lessons better as they know in advance who will be in the classroom supporting them. Time has been allocated for teaching assistants to be involved with the planning of classroom activities. As a result, teachers use other adults more effectively to improve the rate of progress that pupils make.

Marking and feedback to pupils about their work is more consistent than in the past. Staff are using the school's marking policy to indicate better to pupils what they have done well and where improvements need to be made; comments are now more precise and clear. This information is being used more effectively by teachers and middle leaders to gauge pupils' understanding and identify misconceptions throughout the school. Books are tidy, demonstrating the pride that pupils have in their work. However, some staff do not always have clear enough handwriting to demonstrate to pupils the correct way to form their letters.

Since half term, the school has instigated more activities to extend and enhance the use of mathematics and literacy in other subjects. For example, in Year 5, pupils have been measuring the absorbency of different types of kitchen towels. This has helped them understand how to conduct a 'fair test' as part of science work and to be able to identify the best value for money when shopping. Other improvements to the curriculum include the development of pupils' understanding about life in modern Britain. The school has implemented a four-week block for all pupils to learn about and be better prepared for life in a multi-cultural society. The programme effectively covers culture, traditions, festivals, democracy, individual liberty, civil and criminal

law, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths. As a stopgap for this year, it will enable all pupils, particularly those in Year 6, to have a better understanding than before. The school intends that from September 2015 this will be taught as part of the everyday work of the school.

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 needed, and received since September 2014, good quality and extensive external support from the Director of Learning and Achievement of the Multi Academy Trust (the sponsor). In addition, the school has benefited from the services of a seconded deputy headteacher since October 2014, coaching and school-to-school collaboration with a local leader of education (LLE) along with early years support from a specialist consultant. Middle leaders have received good quality training and support from the Wessex Teaching School.

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**