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Mrs Sue Henderson  
St Helen's CE Primary School  
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West Yorkshire  
WF9 4EG

Dear Mrs Henderson

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Helen's CE Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 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 and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. As a matter of urgency, senior leaders and the Wakefield Diocesan Academy Trust (WDAT) must:

- ensure the school action plan has clear and measurable ways of making sure actions taken are having the desired impact on improving pupil progress
- clarify the role and responsibility of the deputy headteacher
- clearly identify the role governors will play in evaluating the impact of actions taken
- ensure all external support is managed well and coordinated to ensure greater impact.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher, who is also the subject leader for mathematics, and three other subject leaders. I undertook a learning walk with you and your deputy headteacher and we briefly visited Year 1 and Year 3 classrooms to review planning and sample pupils' work. I met with three members of the governing body, a group of Key Stage 2 pupils and the director of the Wakefield Diocesan Academy Trust (WDAT). I evaluated the school action plan and other monitoring evidence, including minutes from governing body meetings and the notes of visit from the improvement partner.

## **Context**

Since the inspection, there have been a number of teachers who have left the school. This includes a deputy headteacher who retired, a Year 4 teacher and a Year 5 teacher. The English subject leader is currently on maternity leave and an afternoon nursery teacher has left. A new deputy headteacher started, along with a newly qualified teacher in Year 2 and two supply teachers in Key Stage 2. A teacher has been appointed to teach Year 6 for part of the week now that the Year 6 teacher has become the deputy headteacher.

## **Main findings**

You have helped staff understand the reasons why the school requires improvement. You and your recently appointed deputy headteacher are well aware of the need to improve pupils' outcomes at both Key Stages 1 and 2, especially in relation to writing, as well as needing to improve the effectiveness of subject leaders and middle managers.

There are signs that some progress has been made over the last six months. The pastoral care leader has been effective in raising the profile of having good attendance for a small group of pupils who do not attend regularly. She is tenacious and quick to act. As a result, the attendance rates for this group of pupils are improving.

Pupils have also noticed that teachers are stressing the importance of written work being accurate and well presented. Outcomes at Key Stage 1 have increased this year, especially in the Year 1 phonics check (the sounds that letters represent). However, the picture at Key Stage 2 remains more variable, with mathematics taking a significant decline this year.

Despite these signs of progress, you, and others I spoke with, acknowledge that progress is not as rapid as you would have liked. The actions taken to improve

writing have had limited success. Pupils have been on more trips and visits to encourage and inspire them to write, but written work in books shows that teachers are not using these opportunities well enough for pupils to write at length or in a range of genres. Pupils with whom I spoke told me that they still find it difficult to know what to write about at times. Actions taken so far to improve writing have not been effective enough.

The school action plan does not show precisely what the intended impact of actions will be on improving teaching or pupil progress. This means that actions taken so far to improve teaching are too hit and miss. There is a lack of clarity about what aspects of teaching need to improve. Governors are keen to see the school improve and cite examples of where there have been improvements. However, due to the weaknesses in the school action plan, governors are not clear enough on their role, throughout the year, for checking whether improvements are on track or at the right pace.

There are still too many occasions when pupils are doing work that is not challenging enough, and teachers are slow to move pupils on when it is clear that they can do harder work. Teachers' planning does not consistently guide teaching assistants in how they should be supporting identified pupils in class. Consequently, senior leaders are not sure whether teaching assistants are helping the right pupils at the right time.

The new deputy headteacher is unclear about aspects of her new role. Key questions such as who is leading the improvements to teaching and who is line managing teaching assistants have to be fully answered. Middle managers and subject leaders are not paying enough attention to what the intended impact will be of their actions.

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 WDAT has helped forge links between your school and other schools that are good or better. The trust has also tried to recruit new high-quality staff to the school. However, despite these efforts, the support from the trust is ineffective. Termly visits to the school do not focus sharply enough on the impact the school is having on tackling those areas of weakness identified in the inspection report. Improvement partner reports are occasionally late, inaccurate or lack clear timescales for when suggestions need to be acted upon. The trust has not done enough to check that the school action plan is fit for purpose.

There have been recent changes to how the trust supports the school. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work. There is a lack of clarity as to how support from the WDAT will be managed and coordinated alongside additional support the school has sought from Wakefield City Academy Trust. The Director of the WDAT acknowledges that not enough pace or urgency has been shown in tackling the areas for improvement from the inspection back in March 2015.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Wakefield. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

**Phil Smith**

**Her Majesty's Inspector**