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Mrs K Pennicotte-Henrie
Headteacher
Rowlands Castle St John's Church of England Controlled Primary School
Whichers Gate Road
Rowlands Castle
PO9 6BB

Dear Mrs Pennicotte-Henrie

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Rowlands Castle St John's Church of England Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with you, one of the assistant headteachers, the English leader, a group of pupils from Years 2, 4 and 6, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I visited classrooms, scrutinised work in pupils' books and evaluated documentation which supports the school's work to keep pupils safe and manage behaviour.

Context

Since my last visit, one of the two assistant headteachers has returned from maternity leave. A teacher left at the end of the summer term and two new teachers joined in September.

Main findings

Your actions to improve the school are effective and have resulted in more rapid progress. You have developed the roles of middle leaders. They are clear about their responsibilities and, through training from you and the local authority, they now have the necessary skills to support your drive for improvement in their subject areas. The regular leadership team meetings are helping middle leaders to gain an overview of improvement across the school and they are developing skills to be able to support you further.

You, other leaders and governors are much more self-critical and this has led to increased accuracy when evaluating how well the school is doing. This has helped you identify where further improvements are required. However, there is a lack of clarity about exactly what needs to be done and in what order, so that the rapid progress you have made continues.

Governors' monitoring is now much more rigorous. They now make regular visits to school to check improvements and they are much clearer about where the school is because they have seen it for themselves. The visit reports provide helpful information. Governors are more aware of the need to challenge school leaders, but minutes of their meetings do not show clearly enough that this is happening.

The school's work to keep pupils safe is effective. The new system for managing behaviour has been well received by pupils who explain clearly what happens and why. Pupils enjoy school and say they are working harder, which is reflected in the improvements in pupils' work and progress since my last visit.

Teaching is improving and teachers now plan lessons which meet the needs of pupils much better. Teachers are more skilled at challenging pupils to learn more, and pupils comment that they are often pushed to challenge themselves. Leaders have trained teachers to use open-ended questions so that all pupils have to think harder and explain the reasons for their answers. This is helping pupils to make more progress.

Teachers are much clearer about what pupils can do. The regular pupils' progress meetings help teachers and leaders to know which pupils are not making enough progress. Additional support is provided to help pupils catch up, but it is not clear how much progress individuals need to make each term to ensure that they close the gaps with their peers. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.

Teachers consistently follow the marking and feedback policy. You and other leaders check books regularly to make sure that the marking is relevant. Some teachers make useful comments so that pupils know what they need to do next, but this is not the case in all classes.

Teaching assistants are providing more useful support for individuals and groups. They are clearer about how to use their time effectively to assess what pupils can do. In all the classes I visited, adults were working effectively with pupils, either individually or in small groups.

All of these improvements are leading to better achievement for pupils. This was demonstrated in the recent 2015 national test results, which had improved significantly on the previous year. Reading and writing across the school is now broadly in line with, or above, the national average. Where gaps remain, such as for disadvantaged pupils, boys' writing and mathematics, there is insufficient clarity about how the school intends to close the gaps.

External support

Useful support has been provided for you and other leaders by the local authority. Through joint learning walks, book scrutinies, checks on planning and specific training, middle leaders are becoming more effective in their roles. The local authority is committed to continuing this support until such time as leaders are able to drive improvements on their own.

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

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Her Majesty's Inspector