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Mr Garry Johnson
St Mary's Church of England Primary School
Balderstone
Oldham Road
Rochdale
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Dear Mr Johnson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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.

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement in April 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 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 my visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the subject leader for mathematics. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the Church of England Diocese of Manchester and two representatives from the local authority. Assisted by the school's business manager, I scrutinised the single central record of the checks made on behalf of governors on the suitability of adults to work with children. This enabled me to confirm that the record was compliant with statutory regulations. I examined a number of school documents, evaluated the work in a sample of pupils' books and met with a charming group of Year 5 pupils who eagerly shared with me their thoughts and

opinions about St Mary's. You accompanied me on a tour of the school. This gave me the opportunity to see your colleagues and the pupils at work.

Context

Since the most recent inspection, the executive headteacher has returned to her own school and you joined the staff as the permanent post-holder in June 2015. One teacher has left the school and there is a new teacher working in the Reception Year. You have carried out a review of the school's staffing structure. Governance has been reviewed in line with the recommendations in the previous inspection report.

Main findings

You are bringing to your post drive and determination coupled with an unwavering vision which is rooted in the belief that all children are able to succeed. In your short time at St Mary's, you have gained a sound understanding of what needs to be done to improve the school and taken swift action to deal with the most pressing priorities. For example, your review of the staff structure has led to much greater clarity about the responsibilities of individual members of staff. This is enabling you to hold them to account for the quality of their professional practice and pupils' outcomes.

Senior leaders have introduced a rigorous approach to the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. They use a range of evidence, including observations of teachers' classroom practice and scrutinising the work in pupils' books. This has enabled them to evaluate the impact that individual teachers have on pupils' progress. As a result, senior leaders have a secure understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. They have acted with alacrity to eradicate any weaknesses and provided appropriate training to bring about improvements in the quality of teachers' work. Consequently, senior leaders and governors report that the quality of teaching continues to improve, which, in turn, is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

To address issues with pupils' learning in mathematics, reading and writing, you have introduced a number of new initiatives. These include 'Big Maths', 'Grammar Hammer' and 'assertive mentoring'. The latter is enabling teachers to keep a close eye on their pupils' progress and put in place extra help for those who fall behind. However, although you and your colleagues firmly believe that these new approaches will bring about substantial improvements in pupils' outcomes, it is too early to assess their impact.

The senior leaders' recently introduced marking policy is consistently applied by all teachers. As a result, pupils' books are marked regularly and teachers' use of different coloured pens enables pupils to identify the strengths in their work and those aspects that need improving. However, some teachers' comments lack

precision, not making it clear to pupils what they have to do to correct any errors. Consequently, opportunities to actively involve pupils in learning from their mistakes are being missed.

The pupils I spoke with responded positively to questions I asked about the new behaviour policy. They said it was understood by their peers and consistently applied by their teachers. The loss of Friday's 'Golden Time' for breaches of the school's rules is seen as a big incentive to behave well! Our tour of the school provided further evidence of how well pupils behave and their positive attitudes to learning. In the classrooms we visited, the pupils we saw were engaged and on task.

Wall displays are bright and well maintained, contributing to a pleasant environment for learning where pupils' work is valued. Pupils wear their uniform smartly and respect the school buildings and grounds. This is evidenced by a site that is litter and graffiti free.

The review of governance has clarified governors' roles and responsibilities. Minutes of meetings and governors' records of visits provide evidence that they are supporting you in your work to improve the school and holding you to account. However, the role of the governors' scrutiny committee needs firming up so that it is clear how they are monitoring the progress senior leaders are making against the areas for improvement in the inspection report.

The school improvement plan and the governors' action plan identify clear areas for improvement. Allied to the latter are specific actions that focus on the key issues. Personnel responsible for implementing these actions and, as a consequence, accountable for their impact are also identified. However, some of the impact measures by which you and your colleagues can assess the success of your work are not sharp enough. This is because they are not always linked closely enough to pupils' outcomes.

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

Prior to your appointment, officers from the Church of England Diocese of Manchester, in partnership with the local authority, successfully brokered the services of an experienced headteacher to lead the school. The Diocese is represented on the governing body, helping boost its capacity. The local authority continues to monitor the school closely, regularly checking the progress you and your colleagues are making against the priorities in the school development plan. As a result, they have been able to provide senior leaders with targeted support. For example, local authority advisory staff have been effective in helping you tackle weak teaching and address underperformance at middle leadership.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Rochdale and the Director of Education for the Church of England Diocese of Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector