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Ms Nicola Parker
Orchards Church of England Primary School
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Dear Ms Parker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Orchards Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 March 2016, 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection in June 2013, 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- reduce the inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the school so that pupils can make accelerated progress
- ensure that teachers expect more of pupils, especially in lower key stage 2, and plan learning that meets their needs more precisely so pupils can achieve more
- consistently give precise and specific feedback that helps pupils know how to improve their work and presentation
- use support staff more effectively and consistently throughout lessons to

accelerate the progress of pupils, particularly those who speak English as an additional language

- ensure that leaders consistently use the systems to monitor and tackle poor teaching rigorously
- make sure that governors receive the necessary training and support to understand their roles and responsibilities when conducting visits, in order to increase their level of effective challenge.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your middle leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the effectiveness of actions taken since the last monitoring visit in the autumn term. Together with you, I observed the teaching of phonics in different Year 1 groups, the teaching of English in Year 2 and Year 4 and the teaching of mathematics in Year 6. I looked at pupils' work in Years 2, 3, 4 and 6. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including that relating to performance management, pupil premium spending, governors' minutes and in-school performance information. Systems for vetting and recruiting staff were checked.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one teacher has left the school and another is now on maternity leave.

The capacity of the senior leadership team has been affected as a result, with the deputy headteacher now teaching a Year 6 class full time. Although you have plans in place to address this, these will not be in effect until September 2016.

You received a warning notice from the local authority in November 2015. Governors have responded appropriately to the letter.

Main findings

As you acknowledge, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remains inconsistent across the school, within year groups and in different subjects. As a result, the outcomes for all pupils are not rising quickly enough to ensure that the standard of education can be considered good at the next section 5 inspection.

The pace of change remains too slow and inconsistent throughout the school. In books, the quality of the work produced is often too low, something that is accepted by some teachers. For example, in lower key stage 2, pupils are not catching up quickly enough; teachers too often plan learning that is at the same standard expected of younger pupils and does not meet their needs. Equally, pupils are provided with little guidance on how to improve their work. Consequently, by the time pupils reach upper key stage 2, they have too many gaps in their knowledge

and understanding. Achievement is still significantly below national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics.

While there are some improvements in teaching, they are inconsistent. For example, the standard of presentation in pupils' books is improving in Year 2 but this good practice is too infrequently insisted on by teachers. Resources in some lessons seen were of a high quality and gave pupils a sense of pride. In these classes, pupils were able to explain how to organise their writing and what they needed to write about. This was because of the clear and thoughtful prompts that teachers had provided. In others, poor presentation and too many generic worksheets prevent pupils from making sufficient progress and achieving to their capabilities. Some teachers do not have sufficient subject knowledge to help enough pupils learn well, deepen their understanding and practise their skills, especially those who speak English as an additional language.

Where teachers have higher expectations, pupils work hard, are conscientious and show they have the skills to succeed. For example, in Year 6, the most-able pupils enjoy the challenges they are given in mathematics so they can work at their own level and pace without the need for adult intervention.

The teaching of phonics has improved since the last inspection. Leaders have improved staff training. Lessons are now well organised and adapted to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils are able to practise their early reading skills more consistently. During these small-group lessons, support staff use effective questioning to help pupils make progress. But in other lessons, these staff are not deployed specifically during whole-class teaching times and have very little impact on pupils' learning.

Governors have received their review of governance since the last monitoring visit, but this was slow to happen and they have only recently written a brief action plan. From evidence in minutes, governors are asking more questions of school leaders, but still lack a clear and accurate understanding of the position of the school. The governing body is dedicated and committed to the values of the school but it is not driving the pace of change strategically enough.

Due to difficulties in staff recruitment, school leaders and governors have taken the decision that the deputy headteacher teaches Year 6 this term. This is impacting on the overall capacity of leadership, giving the headteacher too much to do. The local authority now provides additional support to the school. Representatives visit more regularly to assist with monitoring and evaluating the school's performance. Although the impact of these visits is too early to assess, there is a greater accuracy in evaluating the quality of teaching and its impact on the progress that pupils make. Plans are more clearly linked to the priorities from the last section 5 inspection.

Since the last visit, middle leaders have started to demonstrate the impact of their leadership and are monitoring more consistently using the school's termly

operational calendar. In English, much work has taken place to provide organisation and a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics and early reading. There are signs of a positive impact on pupils' progress in Year 1.

External support

The local authority issued a warning notice to the school in November 2015. Since January 2016, the local authority has increased the intensity of support and two officers are now working closely with school leaders and governors to accelerate the pace of change. The local authority has recently, and accurately, deemed the work of leaders in keeping a single central register to demonstrate vetting and recruitment procedures not compliant.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Ely, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall

Her Majesty's Inspector