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Miss Brown  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School  
Lansdown View  
Timsbury  
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BA2 0JR

Dear Miss Brown

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

Following my visit to your school on 16 May 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2015, 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.

The school should take further action to:

- secure a full complement of governors who have appropriate skills and an understanding of the level of commitment involved in the role.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, I evaluated the school improvement plan. I met with you and the two subject leaders for English and mathematics to consider the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with two representatives from the local authority and the national leader in education (NLE) who is supporting you. I held meetings with three governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body, a group of pupils and all members of the teaching staff. We visited the classes together to observe pupils at work. I also spoke to a number of parents at the end of the school day.

## **Context**

Since the inspection, you have employed an additional teaching assistant. Currently, the deputy headteacher, who is responsible for special educational needs provision, and the teacher who provides support for small groups are both on maternity leave. The headteacher and special educational needs leader from Batheaston Church of England Primary School are providing additional support to the school during their absence.

## **Main findings**

The outcomes of your inspection were undoubtedly a shock to you, your staff and the wider school community. This was compounded by the prolonged delay to the publication of the report. You admit it took some time for you all to recover from the disappointment and, for a time, morale was low. However, your engagement with a national project that focuses on pupils' achievement, particularly the disadvantaged and those who are most vulnerable, has re-energised you and your staff. Coupled with the strong support you are receiving from working in partnership with another local school, the drive and commitment of all staff and governors for continuing improvement are clear.

You and your teaching staff are making sure that the work set for pupils is much more challenging. There is a greater depth to pupils' learning and this helps them to confidently use their skills to solve problems and make reasoned explanations. In particular, pupils have noticed that the work they do in mathematics is much more challenging and they enjoy having to explain what they have found out in their learning. They are very enthusiastic about using their mathematics skills to explore their topics. For example, they report that they feel like 'real scientists' when they use mathematical terms such as 'mean, median and mode' when learning about 'rockets and space'.

Similarly, pupils are extending their use of their literacy skills by using interesting texts, such as 'The iron man', as a starting point for poetry, drama, dance and other subject areas. Making their own programme as a follow-up to their topic on endangered species at a national television network studio provided a very high-

quality opportunity for the pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and solve problems in their roles as producers, directors and sound technicians.

During our walk around the school to see pupils at work, we observed them concentrating hard and taking an eager role in their learning. For example, one class were engrossed in a debate about whether famous sportsmen and women deserved to earn lots of money. They presented clear and articulate speeches for and against the argument and showed high levels of personal confidence, cooperation and skill when they discussed the different viewpoints.

Since the inspection, the subject leader for mathematics has rewritten a policy to ensure that calculation problems in mathematics are taught consistently and activities are linked more closely to the programmes of work used by the teachers. She has ensured that teaching staff fully understand the new policy by leading staff meetings and undertaking reviews of pupils' work. Following one scrutiny of pupils' books, the subject leader noted that, at times, not all groups of pupils were being fully challenged. Immediate action was taken to involve teaching assistants in providing individual pupils with the support they needed. Teaching assistants comment on how much they feel their role has improved because they feel much more involved in the classroom. A parents' workshop, which explained the way that you teach addition and subtraction in school, was very well received by parents, as reflected in the high attendance rate at this event.

It is clear from our discussions that you and your staff regularly and rigorously check the progress that individual pupils are making. Working with other local schools to moderate pupils' progress has enabled you and your staff to gain confidence in the judgements that you make.

You and the governing body have demonstrated strong strategic direction in the way in which you have responded to the recent need for maternity cover. There has been no compromise on quality just to ensure that vacancies are filled. A number of changes have been made to the staffing structure which provide you with the support you need. In addition to this, you and your staff are having high-quality support from the headteacher and her teachers from Batheaston who have taken on a number of roles. For example, weekly support is provided by the special educational needs leader from Batheaston whose expertise has been especially welcomed by your staff.

Governors report that they are impressed with the way that the school continues to improve and compliment the way in which you are honest and transparent about issues or concerns. You keep them well informed about pupils' progress and they carefully monitor the impact of the way in which additional government funding is used to support those who are entitled to it. Responses to a recent questionnaire sent out by governors to parents had an overwhelmingly positive response. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school is well led and managed. As one parent explained: 'It always has its doors open. The headteacher and teachers hear and support any concerns.'

Nevertheless, you and other leaders and managers of the school are fully aware of the need for greater capacity among the governors. The recent turnover of governors has left a number of vacancies, including the chair of the governing body. They are being very proactive in rectifying this situation by seeking help from the local authority and other nearby schools but, as yet, have been unsuccessful.

### **External support**

You are being well supported by an NLE from Batheaston who works closely with you and your staff and is very well respected. Local authority officers are keeping a close eye on the school. Recently they carried out a school review of the areas identified as requiring improvement at the inspection. Teaching staff report that they found this a positive and encouraging experience. Your staff have also found the support you receive from external consultants very helpful in supporting them to teach knowledge and skills through stories and different types of texts.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Bath and Wells and the director of children's services for Bath and North East Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**