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Mrs Susan Wardle
Emmanuel Holcombe Church of England Primary School
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Dear Mrs Wardle

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

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school. The school should take further action to:

- develop the leadership of subjects other than English and mathematics to ensure that all aspects of the primary curriculum have due weight and attention in all classes
- ensure that pupils are able to gain the appropriate skills and knowledge in subjects other than English and mathematics through a broad, balanced and progressive curriculum
- ensure that pupils have the technical ability to write, including an accurate grasp of spelling and punctuation, so that more reach and exceed the expectations for their age.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and four teachers who are leading different aspects of the school's work. I also met with five members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. You and I visited every classroom to observe pupils at work and to look at their books. I evaluated your improvement plan and considered other evidence, including the 2015 validated outcomes for pupils, achievement information for pupils currently at the school and your checks on teaching. I met a group of eight pupils from different classes across key stage 2 to gain their views of the school.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2015, there has been a change in leadership. The previous headteacher left at the end of the autumn term. You assumed the role of acting headteacher until April 2016, when the governing body appointed you as substantive headteacher. One teacher, in the early years, is on an extended leave of absence. Her post is being covered by a temporary teacher.

Main findings

The change in leadership has been managed well. Staff and governors are buoyant, re-energised and ready for the challenges ahead. Everyone is pleased that the recent inspection acknowledged the positive changes since the first 'requires improvement' judgement in 2013. Nonetheless, all readily accept that the pace of improvement during this period was not fast enough. No one is wasting time disputing the inspection findings. Instead, you, the staff and the governors have set your sights towards a brighter future with renewed energy and determination. Staff morale is high. They are behind you completely. Staff are keen to contribute to Emmanuel's future success. They are taking on extra responsibilities with enthusiasm and adapting to change without fault. They are also giving their time to provide a broader range of extra-curricular activities to enhance pupils' enjoyment of school.

You have gained the trust and confidence of staff quickly. You listen, take their views on board and ensure that they have the training and resources to do their job effectively. You have approached the next stage of Emmanuel's journey calmly and systematically. You have taken the time to consider what is working well, what strategies need tweaking and which initiatives are not bearing fruit. Consequently, you have avoided starting from scratch. Change has only happened where and when it is needed. This means that you have given staff the opportunity to build on

the foundations laid in recent years. This is giving them confidence in their skills, which in turn is harnessing their desire to improve further.

Much has been achieved since the inspector left your school in September 2015. You have reviewed how teachers assess pupils' achievement and have built in time for teachers to work together to check their judgements. You are seizing the opportunities to work collaboratively with local schools so that teachers can share and learn from good practice beyond the school building. Whole-school approaches to teaching have been revisited and teachers have the chance to access the training they need to update their skills. All of this work is paying dividends. Teaching is improving across the school and expectations are rising in all classrooms. Pupils are working harder and taking greater pride in their learning.

Teachers are using their stronger subject knowledge to develop pupils' skills and understanding through creative and purposeful activities. Not one of the Year 1 and Year 2 pupils swayed from their task to produce a comic strip for their own super hero during my visit. Pupils were enthralled and keen to set pencil to paper because the activity, supported by thoughtful resources, captured their interest completely. Teachers are highly skilled in forging positive relationships so that pupils feel safe to share their ideas and to make mistakes. Pupils are noticing the positive changes you are bringing. They enjoy school, feel challenged and appreciate their teachers, who make learning fun.

The early years indoor environment has been transformed and there are exciting plans already under way to bring outside learning to life. Children are now able to access meaningful activities across all areas of learning. This is helping them to develop as well-rounded youngsters by the time they leave Reception. A much greater proportion of children are on track to reach a good level of development than has been the case in recent years. Adults are keeping a close eye on the progress each child makes and use this information effectively to plug any gaps. The 'challenge' activities are working well in promoting children's independence as well as meeting their learning needs. This strategy is making a difference, particularly to boys. Their interest in learning, a weakness in the past, is improving strongly.

You have moved quickly to review the provision for pupils who find learning more difficult. The catch-up strategies have been overhauled to check that they are making a difference and new ones added to make children's learning more fun. Teaching assistants are taking a greater role in keeping a check on pupils' progress so there is common understanding of how well these pupils are faring. There is still more to do to ensure that the most able pupils achieve their very best. Currently, too few are exceeding the expectations for their age.

Your data shows that pupils' progress is improving, although pupils' achievement in writing continues to lag behind their gains in reading and mathematics. You have

built on the new strategies for teaching writing so there is a common approach across all classes. This strategy is giving pupils an understanding of texts and helping them to write imaginatively for different purposes. Much of their writing is well structured and interesting to read. Nevertheless, their success as writers is often hampered by their weaker technical skills. Far too many pupils have considerable weaknesses in spelling. Many pupils fail to spell common words. Although many pupils have been taught appropriate punctuation skills, many do not use this learning routinely in their writing. This is holding too many pupils back and preventing them from becoming the writers they should be for their age and capabilities.

You know what needs to happen next. Your carefully crafted action plan sets a clear route for the next stage of the school's journey. You are checking the impact of your work more systematically and keeping abreast of improvements in the classroom through frequent checks on teaching. Your recent analysis of parents' views points to increasing levels of satisfaction in response to the changes you have made.

While there is much to celebrate about the positive changes at Emmanuel since the previous inspection, some areas have moved more slowly. You have reviewed the role of subject leaders. However, despite the enthusiasm of these leaders, they are only just off the starting blocks and have had limited influence on teaching so far. Not all subjects are being led effectively at the moment and this shows in pupils' books. Pupils are getting a better deal in terms of reading, writing and mathematics than in the past. However, this is not being matched by their gains in other subjects such as history, geography and science. Pupils' books point to a lack of breadth and progression in some subjects. Plans are in place to tackle this area but, at this point in time, too little has been accomplished to ensure that pupils achieve well across the whole primary curriculum.

The governing body continues to build on the positive steps members took two years ago to improve governance. They are strengthening their expertise and knowledge of the school by holding all leaders to account through their frequent visits to school. Governors are determined that similar criticisms will not be levelled at them at the next inspection. They have worked with you to clarify the level of information they need to offer well-informed challenge. This is leading to a common understanding of teaching and pupils' achievement across the school. Governors are a positive ally in your quest for Emmanuel to become good at the next inspection.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective, well-tailored support to aid you in your improvement journey. You, the staff and governors speak highly of the support you have received. A local authority officer has supported governors well through the leadership recruitment process to ensure that the school's progress did not falter during a time of change. An officer has been on hand to support you as you have moved into the role of headteacher. The advice, guidance and financial support provided by the local authority has been timely and useful in helping you to make links with other schools, update learning resources and provide training for teachers. An officer has brokered a support package matched to your needs in partnership with the teaching school alliance. This is enabling teachers to visit local schools and learn from others. Further training for subject leaders is already in the pipeline to tackle this identified area of weakness.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Manchester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector