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Miss Julie O'Neill
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Dear Miss O'Neill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Acton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 June 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 November 2015. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, three of your senior leaders, two governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of other monitoring information reviewed. An opportunity to walk the school with you enabled me to see pupils at work in lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection, staffing and the school roll have remained largely the same.

Main findings

You, your team of leaders and the governing body feel that the inspection clearly identified what the school does well and what needs further strengthening. You all feel that the school is improving and that there is nothing preventing it from being judged good at its next inspection.

A detailed plan for improvement is firmly in place. You and your senior team are using it to gauge the impact of your actions and monitor the rate at which improvements are being secured. Plans rightly prioritise improving provision and outcomes in key stage 2.

Staff have responded positively to additional training to improve their knowledge and understanding of the teaching of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Aspects of this are now taught discretely to pupils each day. Your monitoring shows that this is having a notable impact on improving their writing. Guided reading has been introduced but needs more time to become firmly embedded. New resources to accelerate pupils' reading further have recently been purchased ready for implementation later this year.

Your leader of mathematics has provided staff with further training and guidance on the teaching of mathematics. Teachers are using new resources to aid their teaching. Extra, one-to-one support from an external mathematics tutor is being targeted towards pupils of all abilities, including those identified as most able. Teachers have also had opportunities to visit other schools to observe good practice.

You have stressed the importance to all staff of raising their expectations of pupils, and providing work that challenges those of all abilities, especially the most able. You feel that progress has been made in this, in particular adding greater depth to pupils' learning. However, during our brief learning walk, we saw very few examples of teachers providing additional or extra challenge for pupils.

Improvements made to teaching are now underpinned by more rigorous assessment procedures. Information gained from 'hot and cold' tasks in lessons provides staff and governors with a clearer overview of how well individual pupils are doing. It also enables you to identify those in need of additional help to achieve what they are capable of attaining.

Your most recent data shows that the proportions of pupils expected to meet or exceed age-related expectations at the end of key stages 1 and 2 this year are higher than those achieved in 2015. Current progress data shows that pupils in all classes are making good progress overall. However, this does not consider fully your own findings that some key groups of pupils are not doing as well as others, and that some teaching requires significant improvement.

Pupils' books show that feedback about their work is becoming more regular but is not carried out systematically by all staff. Monitoring reviews by an external consultant and the local authority have highlighted weaknesses. In particular, some staff are not adhering to your agreed policy to mark work regularly.

You are holding teachers accountable by observing them teach and by meeting with them regularly to review the progress made by pupils in their classes. Arrangements to manage their performance have been tightened up. Targets are similar to those set last year but are now reviewed more rigorously. Staff now understand your expectations that pupils in their classes must meet the expectations of them.

Leaders of subjects and assessment demonstrate a better understanding of their roles in leading improvement. They have gained in knowledge and experience by visiting other schools to learn from their leaders and refine their own practice. They have also benefited from the support and challenge provided for them by an external consultant and local authority staff.

Governors feel that the information you provide for them is much more concise and meaningful. Colour-coding of data enables them to tell at a glance how well pupils are progressing. Records of meetings show that the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection are not monitored explicitly to make sure that these are resolved fully. Governors are increasingly asking questions about the performance of pupils. They are also beginning to ask you whether assessment data reflects the progress pupils make in lessons and the quality and quantity of work in their books. Key leaders are invited to attend meetings to update governors on the improvements they are leading.

An external review of governance has just been completed and shared with the school. You are poised to follow up the recommendations made to reconstitute the governing body in order to streamline its core duties and increase its efficiency.

External support

The school continues to work collaboratively with the local authority to aid its improvement. Their regular visits to review the progress made help to reassure you that the actions you are taking are making a difference. They also help to check that targets are met within given timescales. They feel that appropriate action is being taken to improve the school. Good links have been brokered with local schools to enable your staff to observe good practice. You are also drawing on effective additional support from an external consultant to provide staff training and to monitor the school's improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector