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Claire Collett
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Dear Claire Collett

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

Following my visit to your school on 13 September 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place March 2016, 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:

- Ensure that the recent policies and procedures for marking and feedback and for problem-solving in mathematics are fully embedded so that they are having an impact on outcomes for pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, leaders for English, mathematics, inclusion, early years and lower key stage 2 and three

members of the governing body, including the chair, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke with the adviser who has been working alongside the school since the previous inspection. I also met with the new adviser from the local authority. I spoke with a group of five pupils and several parents as they brought their children to school in the morning. I visited classrooms with the executive headteacher to see the learning that was taking place. We also looked at work in pupils' books both from the end of last school year and from the start of this year. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. I looked at the single central record and reports from CfBT.

Context

Since the last inspection a new head of school has been appointed. She took up her post at April 2016. Two teachers have been appointed and a teaching assistant has been appointed to work alongside younger pupils. There have been no changes to the governing body since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Although disappointed with the judgments made at the previous inspection, you wasted no time in drawing up plans to bring about improvements across the areas identified. You have injected a sense of urgency into the school and you are determined that provision for pupils should improve.

You have restructured the leadership team of the school. Leaders now work together as a cohesive team sharing your desire to bring about the necessary improvements to the school as quickly and effectively as possible. You have provided them with leadership training so that they can fulfil their responsibilities as senior leaders. This is already bearing fruit. The school's development plan gives a clear overview of the path to improvements in the school. It is supported by individual development plans drawn up by senior leaders, such as for English, mathematics or early years. These plans have detailed timescales for improvement and who is responsible. This enables both you and the governors to hold them to account. The development plan has information about the governors' strategic overview and how they will monitor the progress of the school over the year.

Governors, too, were disappointed at the outcome of the last inspection. Nevertheless, they are very keen that the school should do well. Governors are knowledgeable about the improvements that have been taking place. They have rearranged the timing of one of their meetings so that it can take place during school time so they can see the school in action for themselves. Governors have made sure that information is sent to them well in advance of meetings. They find this particularly helpful for considering the questions they would like to ask to make sure they hold leaders to account well.

You and the newly appointed head of school have focused on improving the quality

of teaching and learning. Leaders support teachers with planning and identify where areas can be improved further. You and your leaders undertake regular checks of teaching and learning, by visiting lessons, looking at pupils' books and scrutinising planning to make sure that improvements are sustained. During our tour of the school, we saw that pupils were engaged with their learning.

You correctly identified that raising standards was your priority. You have reorganised classes in key stage 2 in order to ensure that pupils, including those who are most able, are challenged to achieve the standards they are capable of and those who require additional support can receive it. Pupils are taught in smaller groups, being set by ability for English and mathematics. Pupils remain with their English group for their 'topic' work. During our tour of the school, we saw that pupils were being challenged to complete work that was well matched to their needs. Pupils that I spoke with, including those who are most able, said that the work they do is just right for them. They readily recognise that the same high standards are expected of them in other subjects as in English. One pupil said, 'If you are using punctuation, you can refer back to what you did in English.' Pupils are making links across their learning. Early indications from the provisional results at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 indicate that this is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes. When we looked at pupils' books, we saw that pupils are now benefiting from opportunities to practise their writing at length in a range of subjects.

You have introduced a new policy for marking and feedback across the school. This was piloted last year in Years 5 and 6. The procedure is being rolled out across most year groups currently. However, as we looked at pupils' books in the classrooms we noticed that not all teachers are applying the policy consistently. Pupils are not always following up on teachers' suggestions. This means teachers' comments are not bringing about improvements as well as you would like. You are keen to make sure that this policy is embedded fully and consistently applied across the school without delay.

The mathematics leader has introduced a new approach to problem-solving in mathematics. For example, at this early stage of term, pupils are already becoming familiar with an acronym that will help them to remember how to solve a problem. The mathematics leader has ensured that teachers have had training to help them to promote problem-solving skills more effectively. We saw, during our tour of the school, pupils enjoying cooperating well together to solve problems which required them to find different solutions. We saw pupils drawing on mathematical knowledge from previous lessons to help them. Teaching assistants were making effective use of resources to support pupils' understanding of concepts. They were also asking well-considered questions to help pupils solve problems.

Since the last inspection, the teacher with responsibility for phonics has worked alongside a teacher from another school to compile an action plan to improve the teaching of phonics. They have also shared good practice. Teachers and teaching

assistants have received training in phonics. This began to bear fruit very quickly and by the end of 2015, 63% pupils achieved the expected level in the phonics screening test at the end of year 1. Although this is still lower than the national average, it represents an improvement on previous years.

Our visit to the early years showed that much work has already been done to ensure that children make a good start to school life. We saw children who started school just last week cooperating well together and learning independently. The teacher and teaching assistants were supporting learning effectively, and every opportunity was taken to ask questions that would extend children's understanding. For example, a child found a number eight made of wicker. The teaching assistant immediately asked him to collect eight 'pretend' worms from the soil tray with tweezers. He did so with great enthusiasm and the teaching assistant effectively supported him in counting them accurately.

You have introduced a system of rewards for pupils in school which allows parents to access information about their child's success online. Almost all parents have signed up to use the system already. Pupils and parents said they thought it was already effective in encouraging pupils to do their best and, in particular, to read at home. You have employed a member of staff to ensure that those pupils who do not read regularly at home can do so in school, so that they can benefit from regular practice in this important skill.

Alongside this, the Parent Teacher Association has used funds they have raised to install a vibrant and attractive library, complete with some new books, in the school's entrance. Pupils say they like the new library and they think this will encourage other children to read.

External support

You are outward-looking in your approach to school improvement. You have strong links with Sutterton Primary School, with which Swineshead St Mary's is federated. Since the last inspection, the partnership has been put to good use with staff from each school sharing good practice together. For example, the head of school at Sutterton meets weekly with your reception teacher. They have looked at planning and improving provision together. You are a member of the Boston area peer review group. This is a group of four schools and a nursery who support each other, for example in moderation of assessments. You also have relationships with two teaching schools, one of which has helped your teacher with responsibility for phonics draw up an action plan and provide training for all staff in this aspect.

The local authority in Lincolnshire has recently undergone a period of change. CfBT are no longer the provider for school support in Lincolnshire. However, last term an adviser from CfBT supported both you and your new leadership team in your monitoring roles. You found this support helpful. The new local authority plan to remain involved in supporting this school going forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector