

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



21 October 2016

Ms Claire Newson
Parsons Heath Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Templewood Road
Colchester
Essex
CO4 3EZ

Dear Ms Newson

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

Following my visit to your school on 7–10 October 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.

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:

- regularly review and record the success of actions put in place to address the areas for improvement since the previous inspection
- ensure that pupils, especially the most able, are challenged so that they can make the progress of which they are capable, particularly in mathematics
- ensure that teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to write at length so that they can practise their basic English skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your deputy headteacher and one other senior leader, five members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. We discussed the actions being taken to improve the school. I scrutinised a range of documents and visited classrooms. Along with your senior leaders I also looked at pupils' books and spoke with pupils about their work. I met formally with

a group of pupils and many others informally throughout the day, to talk with them about how their reading skills are developing and about their school.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a new deputy headteacher, and in September you appointed a new senior leader to lead key stage 1 and another was redeployed to lead 2. Two new teachers joined you in June as a job share for the Reception class to cover the permanent teacher's maternity leave. There has also been a change in key stage 2 teachers, both in terms of moving year groups and in the recruitment of a supply teacher. You have worked closely with the local authority to increase monitoring and, as a result, an improvement board was set up in April 2016.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have acted swiftly in response to the findings from the last inspection. You have written a plan for this academic year to address all of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection, along with others that have emerged. As we discussed today, keeping a close check on the progress made since the previous inspection is a key priority. Ensuring that this progress is regularly reviewed with your senior leaders and that it is a routine item on the governing body meeting is central to the monitoring process. You have had to make many changes already this year. You have admirably managed to mitigate any negative impact on pupils' progress. However, the actions you have taken are not recorded as clearly as they could be. Sometimes, therefore, it is not easy for governors to check that actions taken have directly contributed to improvements.

You have already done considerable work to raise the quality of teaching in key stage 2. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Supported by your governors, you have been relentless in the pursuit of good teaching. Early indications of results at the end of key stage 2 are that pupils have made better progress from their starting points in 2016 than in 2015. The school's assessment of pupils currently in key stage 2 confirms this to be the case in the majority of classes. You and I visited classes today. We saw purposeful learning, pupils responding to incisive questioning, and adults moving pupils on in their learning. Presentation of work in pupils' books was of a good standard and the majority of teachers are adhering to the school's marking and feedback policy. Pupils told me that teachers help them to think more about what they are learning, especially in writing. However, they also said that their mathematics work is not as challenging as they would like it to be.

Leaders have refined the school's assessment system so that it is used more consistently and regularly to check on pupils' progress and attainment. This means that there is rapid identification of individual pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Following targeted support work, there is clear evidence in pupils' books that these pupils often make better than expected progress. Phase and subject leaders are

more involved in the monitoring and evaluation of individual pupils and groups of pupils. Monitoring takes place weekly. For example, this week you and your staff evaluated the impact of pupils' reading targets. As a result of such regular activity, senior leaders, many new to their roles, have a much clearer view of the area for which they are responsible. They better understand the part they play in whole-school improvement. Pupils told me today that they are also now aware of what they need to do next in their learning and who or what can help them. However, some of the most-able pupils are still not challenged as much as they could be, particularly in mathematics.

The emphasis you have placed on improving spelling since the previous inspection has borne fruit. You joined a local teaching school in making a bid for improving teaching in phonics and spelling. The bid was successful and the impact, along with other initiatives you have put in place, is evident. Your monitoring, and indeed evidence I saw during my visit, shows that pupils are applying the spelling rules more accurately in their writing. Teachers' expectations are that all pupils have the responsibility to correct any spelling errors they make. Pupils like that teachers helpfully point out these errors to them in the school's 'flick back' system. What is more, pupils make good use of the new dictionaries that you have bought and teachers refer to them regularly. As a result of such a concerted effort, pupils' writing is improving and the sensible attempts they make at unfamiliar words are increasing.

You have also been proactive in identifying other schools to work with. Leaders have found this to be very beneficial, for example when putting together a comprehensive exemplar of pupils' assessed written work. This has aided teachers in their moderation of writing and secured accuracy of their judgements. Your senior leaders and I looked at a variety of pupils' books from the last academic year. These show that there is a developing expectation of good presentation in pupils' work. When we compared these books to those for the beginning of this year, there is a marked improvement. You award certificates for effort, stickers for good presentation, and pupils have to earn their pen licence. Pupils love to come to you to receive these awards. Such incentives are clearly having an impact on pupils' pride in their work and the effort they put into it.

Standards in pupils' reading and writing are improving. You have put in place many initiatives to raise the profile of reading in the school, following disappointing results at the end of key stage 2 in 2015. Immediately following the previous inspection, you and your team set about altering the computer suite to make way for a library. What an inspiring place it is! Pupils told me they like to go there to select their books, read with their friends and sit quietly looking at 'the amazing animals' that you and your staff painted. The introduction of class novels has further inspired pupils. In one class during my visit, the pupils cheered excitedly at the prospect of reading the next chapter in their Roald Dahl book. Teachers regularly check on pupils' understanding of vocabulary, and not just in the context of their reading. They also encourage pupils to think of how they might apply a particular word in other sentences. As a result, pupils' writing is becoming more interesting and the

vocabulary more varied. However, despite us seeing pupils who are ready and eager to write, there are not yet enough opportunities for them to do so at length. This is something that you and your English senior leader are aware of and have planned to address following my visit.

Many governors attend the regular improvement board meetings. You have worked closely with governors to ensure that the assessment information they receive is useful to them. Reports now highlight pupil progress and attainment for individuals and groups within each year group. Governors told me that this has helped them to see the overall picture of achievement and given them the confidence to challenge and ask questions. Although this work is still developing, there is clear evidence in governing body meeting minutes that governors understand what the information is telling them.

The school's safeguarding procedures continue to meet requirements. Parents now have the use of another entrance to the school. Despite it needing additional resources, you are committed to ensuring the security of this gate. As a result, the trial period has been very successful and hugely popular with parents. You have not only maintained effective systems that ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for, but you have improved them so that they are even more rigorous. Pupils agree and say that the school is 'safe, caring and efficient'. Behaviour is good in and around the school and pupils are both polite and courteous.

External support

The good support provided by the local authority before the inspection, has continued. Following the previous inspection, they put in place an improvement board. However, the local authority recognised the school's progress and the decision has been made to remove this monitoring. There have been many other ways in which the local authority has worked with you. They have supported monitoring of teaching and learning, quality assured teachers' judgements of pupils' work, and carried out subject audits in mathematics and English. They have also provided support for key stage 2 teachers with planning, and training for teaching assistants on fractions, reasoning and using mathematical resources. You have attended Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminar and fed back to your governors and staff. I am pleased that you found this seminar helpful and that you have brought some useful ideas back to school.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector