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30 November 2016

Mr Lee Kilkenny
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kilkenny

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Austrey Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 November 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- continue focusing on improving pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching in mathematics.
- use assessment information to identify those pupils who need to catch up lost ground; make sure that the teaching and support provided for these pupils helps them to make more rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- build on the start made establishing a consistent assessment system across the school; it is important that leaders spend less time experimenting with different systems to assess pupils' progress consistently across the school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the chair of the local governing board. I also held a telephone conversation with the director of education of the Birmingham Diocese and a separate call to an external headteacher adviser who has been supporting the school since April 2016. I spoke to some parents and carers at the start of the school day and considered the views of 44 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. You and I visited all classes and spoke to pupils during lessons, as well as looking at some of their work in books or on displays. I evaluated the school's action plans and documents relating to leaders' evaluations of the progress being made since the inspection in March 2016. I checked safeguarding and staff vetting procedures.

Context

There have been significant staff changes since the previous inspection in March 2016. Three of the four classes are now being taught by teachers who joined the school in September 2016, replacing staff who left. The local governing board also has a new chair who joined in September 2016. The local governing board set up a working partnership with one of the other three primary schools in the multi-academy trust (MAT). The headteacher and deputy headteacher manage both schools in this partnership.

Main findings

You and the deputy headteacher, together with the local governing board, have devised effective plans to sustain improvement. All the parents I spoke to and the vast majority responding to Parent View are positive about the school and their children's progress. The school's improvement plan and subject action plans identify the right priorities to improve pupils' achievement and teaching. Leaders' evaluations of the impact of their actions to raise standards are accurate. There are now more rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' work compared with the time of the previous inspection.

Since the inspection in March 2016, there has been a combined effort to tackle underperformance by teachers and the underachievement of some pupils. Intelligent recruitment of new teachers and a significant reduction of weak teaching is already bearing fruit. For example, the most recent national test results show that pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics compared favourably with national figures for both Year 2 and Year 6 pupils. Comparisons with previous years cannot be carried out as the new assessment criteria do not match those of previous years. National phonic screening check results for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils in 2016 improved significantly compared with previous years (comparisons can be made as this check has not changed). In the early years too there has been improvement to the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by

the end of the Reception Year. All these outcome measures point to improving teaching and leadership.

You and the deputy headteacher, rightly, recognise that pupils' achievement in mathematics should still be better. Some of the most able pupils and those who have the potential to reach age-related standards in mathematics just fall short of their learning targets. Current assessments and pupils' work show that achievement gaps or differences still exist between pupils' attainment in mathematics compared with reading and writing. The current focus on improving pupils' problem-solving skills is the right one. However, more work is still needed to ensure that teachers and support staff ask the right questions during lessons and when marking pupils' mathematics work to identify gaps or misunderstanding in their learning.

Leaders have improved assessment information to help teachers monitor and track how well their pupils are doing. They have also started to identify pupils who have fallen behind because of previously weak teaching and support. This focus on pupils who need to catch up is the right one to address what were previously inconsistent expectations and variable rates of progress across classes and year groups.

You have adopted an assessment system that is understood by leaders, governors and staff. You have also put in place more regular checks of pupils' learning and progress. As a result, teachers are now much more accountable to leaders and the local governing board for their pupils' performance. The information recorded using teachers' and leaders' assessments identifies pupils who have the potential to reach high standards as well as those that previously made slow progress. I know that you and the MAT are still in the process of refining assessment systems further. It is important at this stage of the school's improvement journey to make sure that these refinements do not distract you and the staff from applying a consistent method of assessing pupils across classes.

The range of monitoring and the support offered to teachers and teaching assistants are proving to be effective. There are early signs of improvement to the quality of teaching and learning in those classes where pupils were previously underachieving. In addition, early years provision and the quality of teaching are improving well. The teaching and support provided for Reception children is engaging and stimulating. Work in books and records of their assessments (learning journeys) show that Reception children are making more rapid progress than at the time of the previous inspection.

The local governing board is provided with a clear analysis of the standards achieved in each phase of the school. The MAT has also improved accountability through its standards committee. These improved measures combined with better teaching have increased the capacity for sustained improvement. Leaders, governors and staff are in a stronger position than at the time of the previous inspection in March 2016.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school remains good. Pupils are attentive and engaged in lessons. They try hard, persevere with tasks and activities and cooperate with other pupils well during class and group discussions.

British values of tolerance and respect for all beliefs, faiths, customs and cultural traditions are promoted well within the school's ethos and religious character. You and the staff make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Observance of today's Armistice and Remembrance Commemoration involving two minutes silence at breaktime (11am) was respected by all pupils and staff extremely well, including the youngest children in the Reception class.

Pupils are kept safe and secure in school. Safeguarding procedures are effective.

External support

Following the inspection in March 2016, the support and challenge provided by the MAT and partner schools, including the involvement of a consultant headteacher in the local consortium, have been effective. There are now good opportunities for leaders, teachers and governors to see and share good practice. The MAT and the school's leaders and governors have effective systems in place to secure accurate evaluations of the school's work on its journey towards becoming a good school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local governing board, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the director of education of the Heartwood multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Warwickshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Charalambos Loizou
Her Majesty's Inspector