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19 December 2016

Mrs R More
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs More

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

Following my visit to your school on 30 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 July 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:

- secure consistently good teaching, particularly in mathematics across the school
- ensure that teachers plan activities that challenge all pupils, particularly the most able
- ensure that middle leaders' plans for improvement focus sharply on the progress of all pupils, and that leaders hold them to account for whole-school outcomes in English and mathematics

- ensure that all staff have high expectations of pupils' work and accept nothing but the best from them.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the two middle leaders responsible for English and mathematics, five members of the governing body including the chair, representatives of the local authority and Diocese, and a group of pupils, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and middle leader action plans were evaluated. I undertook lesson observations, many of which were with you, looked at work in pupils' books and scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings, outcomes of monitoring activities and the impact of performance management. I also reviewed safeguarding procedures in the school.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have appointed a new teacher in the Year 5 and 6 class. This member of staff has also undertaken the key role of leading mathematics across the school. You have employed a new school business manager and an administration assistant for the school office. Following a successful period of challenge and support by the local authority, the improvement board that was put in place in October 2015 has now been replaced by the current governing body. This governing body has resumed its role of holding leaders to account for pupils' outcomes.

Main findings

At the previous inspection, you were asked to improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching in key stages 1 and 2 and the presentation of pupils' work in their books. You and your governors have worked hard to address all of these areas, and with a measure of success. Summer 2016 results show that the school has an improving three-year trend in the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Results at the end of key stage 1 are likewise rising, although they remain below the national average. Attainment at the end of key stage 2 is also broadly in line with the national average, as was pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The most vulnerable pupils make good progress, and safeguarding remains effective. Your plans for improvement rightly refer to the areas of weakness identified in the previous inspection and any others you have subsequently identified. For example, that boys' achievement is still not good enough. Plans are therefore fit for purpose. You have set realistic but challenging targets. Leaders' and governors' monitoring evidences the improvements that have been made, while also highlighting where achievement is still not good enough.

You have put in place a structured plan to support middle leaders to ensure they better understand the part they play in whole-school improvement. As the mathematics subject leader only joined the school in September, this plan has only been in place since then. The impact of the middle leaders' work is therefore yet to be fully realised. Both leaders understand the priorities within the school and have clear actions to address them. They are both keen professionals who have already identified some aspects for improvement, for example, the implementation of the new calculation policy. You have ensured that time is given to these leaders, which they value, to monitor their areas of responsibility. However, the actions on their improvement plans are not as sharply focused on ensuring that all groups of pupils make the best progress they can. As a result, the outcomes of pupils, although improving across the school, are not yet consistently good. The book scrutiny of pupils' work, undertaken during my visit, supports the findings of your own monitoring. Most-able pupils' achievement is not good enough, especially in mathematics.

You and your staff have ensured that information on pupils' learning gives an accurate picture of their progress. The assessment information has developed since the previous inspection. Appropriate and, more often than not, challenging targets have been put in place to ensure that the school continues to improve. You are adept at using the information teachers give you about pupils' progress to adjust targets where necessary. For example, two year groups have already achieved some of their targets and therefore these have been increased to reflect this improvement. The monitoring of progress and attainment is stringent and regular. You have used this information well in the setting of performance targets for staff which has ensured that all staff understand the responsibility they have for improved pupil outcomes. Middle leaders are already preparing their reports to governors which give much more helpful and clear information about pupil outcomes. What is absolutely clear from leaders and governors is that underachievement of pupils is challenged. It is evident, for example, that the most vulnerable pupils are achieving well. This group of disadvantaged pupils are well supported by the use of additional funding.

In your determination to improve teaching in both key stages 1 and 2, you have put in place individualised programmes to support each teacher. You attended Ofsted's 'Getting to Good' seminars, sensibly using the areas identified for development in the previous Ofsted inspection as a clear focus. This has been crucial in ensuring that these weaknesses remain key priorities for the whole school. Your and governors' monitoring to see how well teachers are benefiting from the support they have received is rigorous, and the impact in the classroom is evident. The local teaching school has also supported some staff in development of such areas as assessment for learning, effective use of questioning and ensuring that activities match the needs of pupils. The opportunities that this affords staff to visit other schools and observe good practice are many and beneficial.

There is some way to go to ensuring that work for all pupils, especially the most able, is appropriately challenging. Pupils that I met with today said that they welcome challenge, one saying, for example: 'When I was asked to come up with my own questions and give them to my partner to answer I really enjoyed it.' However, some pupils also said that their work in mathematics and reading is sometimes too easy. They do not routinely know how well they are doing or what they need to get better at in mathematics, although this is clearer in English. Having looked at pupils' books across the school, this would support what pupils say. Some teachers' expectations of pupils are still not high enough, in both presentation and pupil quality of work. Teachers are largely following the school's revamped marking and feedback policy. There is some very effective practice in key stage 2 which could be shared more widely throughout the school. However, the full impact of teachers' feedback to pupils has not yet been evaluated. Pupils told me today that they value the support they are given to improve their work. For example, the prompts to learning on the classroom walls, or working independently to 'Work it out for ourselves'.

You have highlighted that learning behaviours are not as good as they need to be. From today's visit I would agree. Where there is more effective learning, pupils are attentive, get on with their work and challenge themselves. 'I have chosen the harder challenge because I think the others are too easy', said one pupil. You and your staff have identified that perseverance and managing distractions are the two areas that are less developed. You are currently in the process of formulating a list of good learning behaviours which pupils will use to reflect on their areas of development. Having met with pupils today, it is clear that this is something that they are not only capable of, but would welcome. Pupils also told me today that they would find some lessons more interesting and exciting if, for example, they were given more opportunities to do practical science, art work and cooking, which they eloquently told me, 'As we need to learn cooking for life'. You readily accepted this and will take it forward to provide opportunities for pupils.

Despite considerable work to improve pupils' presentation of their work, the majority is still not good enough. Staff all know the expectations, as do pupils. However, teachers are not yet insisting on pupils consistently demonstrating these expectations. In some cases, it is difficult to see pupils' progress in written work over time because the work is not well presented and little care has been taken over it. Too often this has been left unchallenged.

External support

You have welcomed with open arms any support that the local authority, Diocese and other schools have offered. Governors are very experienced and have a good deal of expertise which they share readily. This has informed their monitoring of progress, so much so the decision has been taken to disband the improvement board. Governors are passionately committed to improving outcomes for all pupils in the school and also to supporting leaders to develop. You have proactively sought

further support from the local teaching school and from a range of other good and outstanding providers.

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