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David Swift  
Executive headteacher  
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Staffordshire  
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Dear Mr Swift

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CofE (C) First School**

Following my visit to your school on 19 July 2017, 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 December 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in December 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not 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:

- develop a system of assessment tracking that allows for monitoring and evaluation of the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils as well as their attainment
- improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by accurately identifying what their specific barriers to learning are and providing additional support and

interventions appropriate to individual needs

- ensure that interventions and support for disadvantaged pupils are evaluated regularly to identify their impact on pupils' progress and attainment
- establish and embed an effective system of frequent and focused checks on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress, and use the results of this monitoring to hold staff to account for the progress of pupils in their groups
- work with the local authority, the federated middle school and other schools to develop leaders' capacity to bring about the necessary improvements in teaching and pupils' outcomes
- ensure that the most able pupils are set sufficiently challenging work, especially in reading.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher who has day-to-day responsibility for the running of the school, the senior leader with responsibility for teaching and learning and two senior leaders from the federated middle school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I had telephone conversations with the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The post-inspection plans and school improvement plan were evaluated. I undertook learning walks with the deputy headteacher and the leader of teaching and learning and I spoke to pupils. I examined pupils' books. I also analysed current attainment and scrutinised notes of visits made by the local authority.

## **Context**

Since the last section 5 inspection in December 2016 you have strengthened senior leadership by the internal appointment of a teacher to the post of leader of teaching and learning. A new chair of governors was appointed in January 2017. A temporary member of staff is leaving the school at the end of term.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have not taken sufficient action to ensure that they have a clear and accurate view of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching are not sharply focused on the most important priorities for the school, are too infrequent and do not identify what actions need to be taken to bring about rapid improvements. Leaders' skills in evaluation and monitoring require further development. There are plans in place to make greater use of expertise from leaders from the partner middle school to be involved on a more regular basis in supporting school leaders. However, these plans have not been fully implemented, so it is not possible to identify the impact they will have.

A revised assessment system has been developed following the introduction of assessment without levels. Teachers use a combination of teacher assessment and regular tests in mathematics and reading. While the system identifies whether pupils are working at age-related expectations, it does not provide leaders with sufficient information on the progress that pupils are making. As a result, leaders cannot use the information efficiently to identify if individuals or groups of pupils are making sufficiently rapid progress or to hold teachers to account for pupils' outcomes.

Leaders have drawn up plans for improvement based on the recommendations from the last inspection. A number of actions have been undertaken and they have had some impact on improving teaching and learning. However, the lack of accurate progress information means that it is difficult for leaders to accurately identify what impact their actions are having.

Leaders do not ensure that any barriers to learning for individual disadvantaged pupils are accurately identified. Leaders have used the pupil premium funding to employ teaching assistants and to provide interventions and support. However, interventions are not sharply focused on the different needs of the pupils and are not evaluated to determine the impact that they are having on pupils' progress. As a result, differences in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics are not narrowing rapidly enough against other pupils nationally.

The appointment of a leader for teaching and learning is starting to have a positive impact, especially in the teaching of mathematics and writing. Pupils undertake regular problem-solving activities using reasoning and this is helping to promote deeper thinking. Teachers now ensure that there is a 'killer' question at the end of lessons that require pupils to apply their mathematical knowledge to an investigative activity. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to apply their skills in grammar and punctuation in longer, independent pieces of writing. Evidence of these improvements were seen by the inspector in pupils' books during the visit. Teachers are all committed to improving outcomes for pupils and are open to advice and support. However, the lack of focused monitoring and incisive feedback limits their capacity to further develop their practice.

The improvements in teaching higher-level reading skills have not been rapid enough. While pupils are set comprehension questions linked to an excerpt from a book that require them to justify their answers, the questions are not matched sufficiently well to the different abilities of pupils in the classes. The chosen texts are not sufficiently demanding for the most able pupils and, consequently, this slows their progress. As a result, too few of the most able pupils are working at higher levels.

School assessment information and evidence gathered during the inspection show that outcomes across the school are still inconsistent. Pupils' attainment in Year 4 is

still below that which is typical for their age for a large majority of pupils in both reading and mathematics.

Governors have a realistic view of the improvements that are still needed in the school. They have valued the support provided by the local authority and recognise there needs to be more collaborative work, both within the federation and across other schools, to allow leaders to develop the necessary skills to drive the school's improvement.

### **External support**

As a result of a review in March 2017, commissioned by the local authority, it was identified that the school was not taking sufficient action to bring about the necessary improvements. As a result, the local authority subsequently issued a local notice of concern. Further work has been commissioned for consultants to support and advise the school. This has resulted in a recent review of provision for disadvantaged pupils and the use of and impact of the pupil premium. There has not yet been time for these recommendations to be implemented. The executive headteacher and chair of governors met recently with representatives of the local authority and are receptive to taking further support and advice.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Hewett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**