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Mrs Joanna Orbell
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Dear Mrs Orbell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Andrew's CofE Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 9 October 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 May 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that teachers use assessment to build a detailed picture of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses to inform the pupil's next steps
- ensure that the tasks teachers set are more challenging and enable most-able pupils to make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were also held with the part-time special educational needs coordinator, a group of teachers and assistants, the chair and three members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work. I made short visits to observe learning in Reception, and key stages 1 and 2. I reviewed a wide range of documents including the single central record, monitoring and action planning documents, and several policies. I met some parents informally at the end of the day to gather their views.

Context

Since the summer term in 2017, the interim executive headteacher has supported the school on a more continuous and formal basis. Two part-time teachers left the school at the end of the summer term, and they have been replaced by two permanent part-time teachers. A new part-time special educational needs coordinator has been appointed to work across the federation.

Main findings

You are resolutely taking the school in the right direction and the changes you are making are having a positive impact. Last academic year, there was a great deal of turbulence in staffing. Staffing is now more stable as a result of your successful efforts to recruit permanent staff. This stability has enabled the school to build further on some of the successes of the last academic year. You are steadfastly and determinedly developing the confidence and practice of the teaching staff, including teaching assistants. Your success in tightening up on the way teachers are monitored and evaluated has been key to improving their practice. In addition, you are effectively using the expertise of staff in the other schools you oversee to assist teachers and assistants in developing new approaches to teaching. However, some new teachers have missed out on training and development that was accessed by staff who have now left. As a result, in some areas their practice needs further development. You have strong plans in place to rectify this.

Close collaboration with the other school in the federation, as well as the school where you have a substantive post, is enabling the teaching staff to develop their practice in phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and writing. New approaches have led to significant improvements in the proportion of Year 1 pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in June 2017. Pupils' results also improved in mathematics and writing in the 2017 key stage 1 national tests and assessments. During the phonics session observed, pupils were able to blend sounds confidently to read whole words and demonstrated a high degree of accuracy when matching letter shapes to sounds. Similarly, many are applying their phonic knowledge when they write, so a greater number of words are spelled

correctly. Pupils are being provided with well-considered opportunities to write at length on a variety of topics, including those linked to the wider curriculum. They are supported well in this by the examples of writing teachers select for them as models. However, some pupils, including the most able, are not applying simple grammatical rules in their writing, such as maintaining the past tense when it is appropriate to do so. Teachers do not always pick up these mistakes and, as a result, some pupils' progress slows.

In mathematics, teaching is also improving because teachers and assistants are making better use of equipment to aid pupils in making links between abstract concepts and real-life mathematical problems. For instance, in Reception children were developing their counting skills well through an activity that required them to locate and count objects that were grouped together. Teaching assistants strengthened their understanding by asking questions that required children to use their skills to hypothesise. Across the school, pupils are developing their ability to apply concepts in mathematics, for example by creating bar charts to show the proportions of pupils with different coloured eyes in the class. However, opportunities for pupils to think deeply and analyse the mathematical information they gather are not always fully developed.

Leaders are developing their skills in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, successfully collaborating with partner schools to ensure that their judgements are accurate. You have introduced a more systematic and thorough approach to quality assuring teaching, learning and assessment. As part of this new approach, you are sensibly setting targets for teachers' future development. You have observed teaching in all classes this term and provided helpful verbal feedback and next steps. You have plans in place to share this feedback with teachers in writing, sensibly linking your feedback into your ongoing reviews of teachers' performance. By being more systematic in your monitoring, you have been better able to identify and meet teachers' training needs. You rightly conclude that some teachers need to develop the way they use information from their assessment of pupils' work.

Following the previous inspection, a review of pupil premium funding spending was swiftly undertaken and you are making steady progress in implementing many of its useful recommendations. There are very few pupils in the school eligible for additional funding but your staff are now much clearer about these pupils' individual needs and how best to meet them. You have successfully sought to work more closely with the parents of disadvantaged pupils. You are sensibly providing them with practical assistance so they can better support their children at home. You have appointed a new part-time special educational needs coordinator, who is closely monitoring the support given to all pupils with additional needs, including disadvantaged pupils. In particular, she is wisely ensuring that additional help for pupils with multiple additional needs is suitably bespoke. You have consequently embarked upon a new approach to supporting pupils who are falling behind in numeracy and literacy. It is too early to judge the impact of this. However, you are

not yet assessing the incremental steps in progress that pupils are making as a result of the additional one-to-one assistance you provide.

Governance has improved and is now much stronger. Governors have stepped up to the mark and grown in confidence and skill. They have benefited from training from the local authority and working alongside school improvement officers from the diocese, who undertook the review of pupil premium spending. Governors have rightly refocused the way they work so that more attention is placed on ensuring that pupils make progress. Governors' questions are now more detailed, more sharply focused and require more careful consideration. To help you to respond to their questions with the level of analysis and depth they now require, governors are sending you their questions in advance of their meetings. This approach is strengthening the positive impact that governors are having on improving the school.

External support

The local authority has supported the school well by coordinating support from a number of schools. This has been effective. In particular, the local authority has wisely brokered an extension to the period over which you will be supporting the school. This has provided additional stability and consistency. Of note, has been the additional effective assistance provided by staff from the school where you are the substantive headteacher. The local authority understands that securing long-term, stable, effective leadership is essential and has well-thought-out plans in place to do this. Training for governors, provided by the local authority, for example on analysing data for different groups of pupils, is being used to good effect. The review of pupil premium spending undertaken by the diocese is also strengthening the school's work to enhance the confidence and achievement of this group of pupils. The local authority sensibly recognises that the training provided for leaders needs to be more sharply focused on the leadership of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector