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Jonathon Gallimore
Interim Executive Headteacher
St James' Church of England Aided Junior School
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Dear Mr Gallimore

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St James' Church of England Aided Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 April 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

The 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other members of the senior leadership, with members of staff responsible for attendance, a small group of the teaching staff and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held discussions by telephone with the chair of the governing body and with a representative from the diocese. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I visited classrooms, observed the pupils working, looked at examples of their work, and discussed with the pupils what they were

doing. A range of other documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding records, records of meetings of the governing body and information about the progress of the pupils.

Context

The interim executive headteacher and interim head of school took up their posts at the beginning of September 2017. There have been several changes in staffing since the inspection and a number of leadership responsibilities have been reassigned.

Main findings

An external review of governance was completed promptly after the inspection. The governing body has responded to the outcomes quickly. It has drawn up an action plan for improving its effectiveness. It is in the process of putting the plan into practice. Already, it has put in place new structures and ways of working. It is building its knowledge and skills and recruiting new members. All of these things are increasing its capacity to hold the school's leaders to account. These developments are laying secure foundations for improved governance, but the full effect on the improvement of the school and in holding the leaders to account has yet to be realised.

The chair of the governing body has been particularly active. She took the initiative personally and made arrangements with an outstanding school to secure the leadership of St James' at least until December 2018. This has stabilised the situation at St James' after a very unsettled, lengthy period. It has been very important in accelerating the pace of change at the school.

Though temporary at this time, the new senior leaders have set about improving the school with vigour. Changes are taking place rapidly. The senior leaders have brought a renewed sense of purpose and direction for the school. They have put in place already a number of more-systematic ways of working that have clarified for the staff the things expected of them. The staff are responding energetically to the changes. Increasingly, they are turning the priorities for improvement set out in the school's development plan into practical actions that are improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Subject and other leaders at the school are being drawn into the work to promote improvement at the school. This development is still at a relatively early stage, although there is already evidence of more-consistent teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. The priority that the teachers are now giving to grammar, spelling and punctuation is very evident throughout the school. The approach does not extend currently much beyond the pupils' lessons on writing.

The senior leaders have provided effective support to the teachers to improve the accuracy of their assessments of the pupils' learning. The existing expertise within the school has been used well, in conjunction with a good level of external support for assessment. Some of the impact can be seen in the much-improved progress made by Year 6 pupils in 2017, compared with 2016, particularly in writing. The school is now 'on the up'.

The teachers are using the school's assessment systems carefully to plan work to meet the full range of the pupils' learning needs. They are gaining a better picture now of how well the pupils are doing and of the things with which the pupils are struggling. They are much more aware now of the need to ensure appropriate levels of challenge for the pupils, particularly those of middle ability. The level of challenge for different groups of pupils is not currently sustained consistently.

All examples of the pupils work that I saw showed care and attention to presentation. Sometimes, the pupils lacked the skills needed to ensure that their work was presented to a high standard.

You have begun work to increase the school's capacity to respond to the challenge of the area for improvement from the inspection to improve the pupils' attendance. You are in the process of recruiting more staff and of realigning the responsibilities of others. These changes offer the prospect of more-effective work, particularly with pupils who are persistently absent, but the arrangements were not finalised at the time of my visit. Nevertheless, the pupils' attendance has improved.

External support

The school has received effective support from the local authority, the diocese and an outstanding school with which it is now linked. A considerable amount of work by the local authority and the diocese has enabled the governing body to make good progress in responding to the outcomes of a review of governance. Though the process is not yet completed, the work has been essential. Other support from the local authority is assisting senior leaders and the governing body in getting a detailed understanding of particular aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that remain to be improved, so that they can target their efforts precisely.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector