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Mrs Janis Radcliffe
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Dear Mrs Radcliffe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 November 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 October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust 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:

- simplify, and make more focused, the self-evaluation and action planning documents
- extend the range of learning opportunities in the early years.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, and deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the multi-academy trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of six Year 4 pupils. I evaluated the school's action plan and leaders' evaluation of the performance of the school. You led me on two learning walks and I spent some time on my own in classes in the afternoon. I examined a few pupils' work in their books as I went round. I read the review of governance undertaken as a direct result of the previous inspection. You showed me information relating to pupils' attendance.

Context

Since the last inspection, the local authority has asked you to open an additional class in Reception Year to cater for a local 'bulge' in the number of children. Your number on roll has grown by 30. The staffing in Year 3 has been unstable since September, but you have shared with parents your plans to ensure consistent practice in the short term and stability in the longer term.

Main findings

You responded professionally to the outcome of the previous inspection. Although staff were disappointed by the findings, you were already acting to make necessary improvements before the inspection. Notably, you were keen to raise the number of children attaining a good level of development at the end of Reception. You were also keen to build on the school's successes in reading with improvements to pupils' outcomes in mathematics. Together with senior leaders, you responded to the inspection findings by redoubling your efforts to build a successful team. You also focused on making improvements to teaching so that all pupils benefit from high 'quality first teaching'. You made sure that support strategies which had proved to be effective with some pupils have been extended to others.

After the last inspection, governors also entered a process of self-evaluation and commissioned a good-quality review of their work. This review made sensible suggestions for how governors could be even more effective. The chair of the governing body is to be commended for responding positively to the report, and putting in place a series of changes which have strengthened governance markedly.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is now good. It is leading to stronger outcomes in all key stages. For example, the proportion of children who attained a good level of development in 2017 was broadly in line with the national average. Moreover, in 2017 the proportion of Year 6 pupils making good progress from their starting points was well above average in reading; the proportion of pupils who made good progress from their starting points was above average in

mathematics and the proportion of pupils who made good progress was in line with the national average in writing. This strong progress meant that the average scaled scores achieved by St Mary's pupils were well above the national averages for reading and mathematics in 2017.

These Year 6 results reflect the impact of strengthened teaching across key stage 2. To replicate this in key stage 1, you have, for example, insisted that teachers now teach phonics systematically from the very start of Reception. Pupils are therefore getting to grips with reading quickly and securely. There is well planned, organised and skilful teaching in Years 1 and 2 which is leading to increasingly strong learning gains.

Teachers work particularly well with teaching assistants. All adults treat pupils with respect and care. They celebrate pupils' achievements, praise pupils' successes and respond to any questions warmly and respectfully. There is a friendly and positive atmosphere around the school. Pupils' conduct is very good. They behave well in lessons, even at the end of long sessions. Teachers' management of behaviour is simple and effective. On the rare occasions when pupils need to be reminded of the school's high expectations and standards, a simple look or word suffices.

You have made improvements to the early years settings. This was partly in response to the findings of the previous inspection. It was also due to your willingness to expand for an extra class of Reception children. You have had to review the quality of the provision and environment to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to thrive. The setting is now purposeful and productive, as well as being efficiently led and managed. We agreed, however, that there are some models of even better practice locally, and further afield, that could add value to what is already available.

You have worked well with representatives of The Good Shepherd Trust. This is the multi-academy trust that sponsors the school. The multi-academy trust has provided you with an effective consultant headteacher, who has worked with you on aspects of the school's improvement journey. You have also benefited from regular reviews of the school's work from other external advisers. They have helped you to fully evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and undertake specific tasks such as checking the single central record. Governors are increasingly involved in the evaluation of the school's performance and processes.

You are determined that the school will be judged 'good' at the next inspection. Your action plans are thorough and thoughtful. They are also long. Each curriculum area has its own plan. As such, the plans are cumbersome. Staff are working to ensure that they deliver the part specifically under their control. However, a simpler, more focused document would reduce the possibility of anything being left to chance, or missed.

External support

The Good Shepherd Trust maintains a watchful eye on the progress of the school. The trust's director of schools visits three times a year. One visit is focused on ensuring that the school's evaluation of its own performance is accurate and robust. The multi-academy trust has brokered valuable support from a consultant headteacher. Support for the governance review was also sought and commissioned. The school benefits from being part of this multi-academy trust in a variety of other ways. For example, groups of teachers meet to moderate their assessments of pupils' work. This ensures consistency of standards across schools within the multi-academy trust as well as developing teachers' skills and confidence in assessing pupils' work. As a result, pupils are working securely towards age-related expectations in all aspects of the curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Hughes
Her Majesty's Inspector