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Mrs Jo Westaby
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Dear Mrs Westaby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Barlestone Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 December 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 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by embedding strategies already in place to meet the needs of different learners
- continue to strengthen governance by ensuring that members of the governing body hold leaders fully to account for all aspects of their work.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and middle leaders. I also met members of the governing body and a representative

from the Diocese of Leicester Academies Trust (DLAT) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and associated action plans were evaluated. You and I visited all classrooms and observed the majority of classes in their lessons. We also visited Year 1 and Year 2 pupils rehearsing for their Christmas production. I met with a group of pupils and also spoke with other pupils in their lessons. I spoke with parents in the morning and considered parental views as shared in Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and those gathered in your own survey. I looked at a range of pupils' workbooks and also looked at their work in lessons to evaluate the quality of their learning. I scrutinised a variety of documentation, including records relating to teachers' performance, safeguarding and pupils' progress.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the leadership or governance of the school since the last inspection.

Main findings

You have maintained the strengths identified at the last inspection and continued improvement is evident. You have shared your high expectations with staff and pupils who are keen to meet them. You have communicated a clear vision and articulated the means by which to achieve it. There is a strong sense of collaboration and determination to bring about further improvements, and all members of the school community are working together to realise your aims.

Immediately following the last inspection, you worked with your deputy headteacher, representatives from DLAT and another headteacher within the trust to write an action plan to address the areas identified as in need of improvement. You then worked with members of the local governing body to create a coherent, detailed plan that is understood by all. You have shared this plan with middle leaders who have used it as the foundation for more specific plans to drive improvements in their individual areas of responsibility, with clear focus on accelerating pupils' progress. This has empowered middle leaders to take greater responsibility and also enables you to hold them to account. Every aspect of the school's work centres around these plans. This ensures that all remain focused on the school's key priorities. Teachers, including yourself, are now routinely set clear targets which are closely aligned to the school's action plans as part of their performance management. This has further strengthened the school's focus on improving outcomes for pupils.

You have strengthened the processes for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress by adding more structure and greater clarity to the existing pupils' progress meetings. At the time of the last inspection, pupils were assessed at half-termly points. You have added an initial 'pre-assessment' point to establish a clear baseline against which to measure pupils' progress. This also ensures that teachers have a

very clear understanding of what pupils can and cannot do, which means they can plan to meet the different needs of pupils. Following each assessment point, you work closely with class teachers to analyse pupils' progress with precision. This allows you to identify pupils who are at risk of making less progress than you expect so that you can intervene appropriately. It also enables you to identify pupils who are making very good progress, with a view to targeting them towards stretch and challenge activities. This information is presented in such a way that it supports teachers to maintain appropriate focus on each individual pupil's needs.

Middle leaders have taken greater responsibility for driving improvements in their areas. You have supported them by ensuring that they have sufficient time to carry out their roles effectively. They conduct regular monitoring activities, such as observing teaching and learning and scrutinising pupils' work. This has provided them with a very sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in different teachers' provision. They use the detailed pupils' progress tracking information alongside their monitoring and evaluation work to support and challenge staff. Middle leaders work closely with class teachers, supporting them to improve their practice in identified areas. For example, the mathematics leader has reviewed class teachers' planning, identified gaps and worked with teachers to ensure that they plan to address these areas in their next lessons.

Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the accuracy of assessment. You have worked with school improvement officers from DLAT, and other schools, to moderate pupils' work in mathematics and writing. This has provided teachers with increased confidence as well as raising their expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. In mathematics, teachers routinely plan activities which provide pupils with the opportunity to access more challenging work, supporting them to make progress towards achieving at the greater depth standard. To underpin this, you have been creative with staffing arrangements to ensure that staff are allocated to classes where they will have the most significant impact.

A key priority has been to improve the quality of provision in mathematics. The mathematics leader has ensured that all staff have access to high-quality resources, particularly in order to stretch and challenge the most able pupils. She has supported staff to challenge pupils' misconceptions through questioning. In addition, she has delivered training to staff to help them to explicitly teach the skills required to develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving abilities. The curriculum provides ample opportunities for pupils to practise these skills. In the classes we visited, there was a range of such activity going on. This was also evident in pupils' books. Pupils themselves report that they now work on these aspects of mathematics regularly and that their teachers help them to 'work things out and to explain how they have done it'.

Following pupils' key stage 2 tests, you identified the need to improve spelling. Leaders have therefore introduced a new approach to the teaching of spelling, which focuses on identifying and learning spelling patterns. This is a significant

change in approach and one which staff and pupils say has been very effective, both in improving spelling and developing vocabulary. Pupils enjoy this approach and are proud of their successes. They explain that they try to use more complex words in their writing because they know how to work out the correct spelling. For example, one pupil told me he was able to write about a 'cemetery' rather than a graveyard. Another used the word 'accommodation' rather than 'hotel'.

Pupils continue to behave very well and are confident, polite individuals. They collaborate well and are keen to support and share. You have recently introduced the 'Year 6 champions' strategy to provide additional pastoral and, in some cases, academic support. Each Year 6 pupil is allocated an adult who meets with them, on a one-to-one basis, each fortnight. You have encouraged a variety of adults to participate in this scheme and all Year 6 pupils have their own allocated mentor. Initially, class teachers guided the content of these sessions but now pupils are taking greater responsibility in setting their own agenda. One pupil was keen to share his experiences of using a thesaurus with a member of the local governing body. Another explained how she has practised her handwriting with a member of non-teaching staff.

Members of the local governing body have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Meetings are well attended and discussions focus appropriately on school improvement. Members are highly visible and participate in many activities. For example, they attend parents' evenings and carry out monitoring visits with leaders. They recognise their responsibility to hold leaders to account and recent meetings reflect a higher degree of scrutiny and challenge. For example, members have questioned leaders about pupils' progress and attainment.

External support

The trust commissions an annual review of the school's performance. This detailed and evaluative piece of work provides clarity of the school's strengths and weaknesses and supports you in developing your plans. The trust has also provided support by facilitating working groups with leaders from other schools in DLAT and by brokering support with other schools from outside the trust. For example, the mathematics leader has worked with teachers in other schools to develop understanding of good practice in preparing pupils for external assessments.

The last inspection recommended a review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding. You took swift action to ensure that this was carried out in a timely manner. The deputy headteacher, as the pupil premium leader, has begun to act on its recommendations. For example, she now monitors disadvantaged pupils' uptake of extra-curricular activities to ensure that they benefit from these opportunities. The school's homework club is attended by a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than others.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector