

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Deborah Thompson
St Andrew's CofE VA Primary School
Ecton Brook Road
Ecton Brook
Northampton
Northamptonshire
NN3 5EN

Dear Mrs Thompson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Andrews CofE VA Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, three members of the governing body including the chair and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Other meetings were held with the English and mathematics subject leaders, the early years leader, four teaching assistants and a group of pupils from key stage 2. The inspector undertook a tour of the school with the senior leadership team and visited all year groups. The post-Ofsted action plans, the school self-evaluation document and the current progress and attainment of pupils in all classes were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the two assistant headteachers have left the school and the senior leadership team has been restructured. A new deputy headteacher and early years leader were appointed in September 2017, and a new assistant headteacher joined in January 2018. The governing body appointed a new chair and vice chair in February 2017.

Main findings

Leaders and the governing body have set about systematically and swiftly tackling the areas for improvement identified in the last report. The post-Ofsted action plan contains specific and precise actions, timescales and monitoring opportunities. Consequently, the governing body is able to hold leaders fully to account for the actions leaders are taking.

Leaders and the governing body have a clear overview of the strengths and development areas in the school. This is because they have undertaken an effective self-evaluation that accurately states what the school is doing well and what leaders need to do next in order for it to continue to improve.

Teachers frequently assess pupils in reading, writing and mathematics and have recently received training in, for example, how to moderate standards of pupils' writing. Teachers have also attended moderation meetings with colleagues from other schools to ensure that the judgements they are making regarding pupils' work are accurate and secure. This accurate assessment helps teachers carefully plan for the next steps in pupils' learning. They are also able to successfully identify the most able pupils and plan activities that challenge and stretch them. For example, in Year 6, the most able pupils, who were writing a story, were asked to use more complex vocabulary and punctuation in order to improve the quality of their work.

Leaders undertake a forensic view of the progress and assessment information. They have a good understanding of which groups of pupils, subjects and classes are performing well and which require extra support. Any pupil who is falling behind is therefore identified and promptly given the help they need to catch up.

Teaching assistants stated that they now have frequent opportunities to work with pupils of all abilities, including the most able. They have received training on, for example, the teaching of mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Consequently, teaching assistants are now deployed more effectively by teachers and are helping to accelerate the progress of different groups of pupils.

The recently revised marking and feedback policy helps to inform pupils of what they should do next in order to improve pieces of work. Time is specifically set aside for pupils to read teachers' 'blue to do' comments and act on errors or further

challenges suggested by the teacher. Pupils are unanimous in their view that this approach helps them to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar skills in writing.

Leaders have ensured that school improvement planning documents are shared frequently with staff. Every term, staff examine the post-Ofsted action plan and help to evaluate the progress of the priorities. Staff now have their own school email addresses that ensure that key messages and information can be shared promptly. Staff members with whom I spoke stated that they now have a much clearer understanding of the part they play in raising standards and moving the school forward.

Leaders and the governing body have ensured that pupils' learning is monitored and evaluated more sharply. For example, recently, pupils' mathematics and writing books have been examined to ensure that the most able pupils are being suitably challenged and that standards of presentation in pupils' books are good. Leaders undertake formal lesson observations that help to identify where teachers' strengths and development areas are. Other informal 'drop ins' by leaders to classes help to ensure that pupils are engaged in learning and behaving well.

Teachers have had the opportunity to share good practice among themselves and with colleagues from other schools. 'Achievement meetings' are held to discuss those pupils who are not making good progress. Here, staff can make suggestions and discuss possible strategies with each other to help to ensure that these pupils catch up. Staff welcome these professional development opportunities as a chance to learn new skills and sharpen existing good practice.

The leader responsible for the allocation and monitoring of the pupil premium funding has acted swiftly on an external review and its subsequent recommendations. For example, '20 day challenges' in reading, writing and mathematics have been introduced. These are targets for disadvantaged pupils to achieve over a short period. Effective monitoring by the pupil premium leader and link governor has ensured that this strategy has successfully contributed to raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

The leader responsible for the early years has acted swiftly to address development areas that were identified in a recent external review undertaken by a local authority early years adviser. For example, children are now accurately assessed when they start at the school, and a new assessment tracker helps the leader to spot quickly any children who are not making the progress of which they are capable. The leader has also been successful in engaging parents and carers and encouraging them to share their child's achievements with staff. Consequently, staff have an up-to-date and more accurate picture of children's abilities and can therefore plan more carefully for next steps in learning.

A recent external review of the governing body has helped governors to have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The review recommended

that governors have 'shadow link governors' to observe the work carried out by leaders and their respective link governor. This will aid with succession planning. The review also recommended that, when a governor carries out a monitoring activity, the strengths and development areas are recorded and shared with other governors at meetings. Consequently, all governors are aware of what the strengths and current issues are. The governing body has been successful in implementing all these recommendations.

The governing body has recently received appropriate training in, for example, how to interpret pupils' progress and attainment information and what to look for when examining pupils' writing books. There is a new governor 'strategy group' that meets frequently to discuss with senior leaders the progress of the post-Ofsted action plan, the school self-evaluation and the progress being made by different groups of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. Minutes of meetings show that governors are asking leaders challenging questions regarding pupil progress and that they spend time at the beginning of a meeting examining pupils' books. Individual governors are carrying out other monitoring activities of school finance, safeguarding and health and safety. Because of this work, the governing body is now more successful at holding leaders to account in their area of responsibility.

Leaders have begun to update the curriculum in order to provide themes that are more interesting for pupils to study. This is particularly the case in history, geography and science. Leaders agree that this area for improvement identified at the previous inspection is a next step for the school.

External support

The local authority has provided effective external support. For example, a local partner school brokered by the local authority has helped to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment throughout the school. Leaders have also benefited from effective strategies to help them analyse pupil progress and attainment information. A local authority early years adviser has supported the early years leader effectively to track closely the progress that children make and to moderate the judgements that staff are making regarding children's attainment to ensure that they are accurate.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier

Her Majesty's Inspector