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Mrs Kneale
Executive Headteacher
St Martin's Primary School
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Herefordshire
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Dear Mrs Kneale

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Martin's Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 June 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 four 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to raise the profile of attendance with parents, so that pupils who are persistently absent attend school more regularly
- adapt improvement plans so that they include all of the key priorities and ensure that priorities can be measured for impact.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection with: the executive headteacher; the head of school; other senior leaders; members of the governing body; and a representative of the local authority. I undertook a learning walk and observed behaviour at lunchtime. I

evaluated the school's improvement plan, checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of governing body meetings; and notes from external support visits, including an external review of governance. I also analysed the quality of work in pupils' books, and assessment information on pupils' current progress.

Context

St Martin's Primary School is part of a collaboration of four schools, including a teaching school. Just prior to the time of the previous inspection, the executive headteacher from the teaching school was appointed to support the school. Initially, this involvement was brokered by the local authority on a temporary basis. However, the arrangement has continued since the previous inspection and is likely to become permanent.

A range of staffing changes has taken place since the previous inspection. Several new teachers and middle leaders started in September 2017, as well as new administrative and pastoral staff. In January 2018, a new special educational needs coordinator was appointed.

Main findings

You provide astute and determined leadership to the school. You share leadership responsibilities well among other leaders. They rise to the challenge and have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. The collaboration and sharing of good practice and expertise across the four schools work well. Several leaders from the teaching school offer effective support. For example, regular training, moderation and team-teaching have helped to improve the quality of classroom practice. Teachers' expectations are higher, which is having a positive impact on pupils' progress.

You have worked hard to build the partnership with parents and carers and to ensure that the future needs of the school community are considered. The reputation of the school is growing and the new Reception intake for September is full for the first time.

There have been several unforeseen staffing disruptions since the previous inspection. You have managed these well by finding cover or recruiting new staff. This has not held back improvements to teaching, but has been difficult to manage. Your resilience here is paying off and in September 2018, you will have a full complement of permanent teaching staff. You rightly plan for this to provide a period of greater stability and consistency in classrooms.

The head of school and deputy headteacher have a secure understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. They work well with other leaders to check the quality of teaching and give teachers useful feedback on how to improve. Other leadership practices, such as precise planning and evaluation of the pupil premium

grant, are having a positive impact. However, the main school improvement plan requires further attention. The plan was put in place to take the school through a period of temporary leadership. However, now that arrangements are becoming more permanent, the plan needs adjusting. As it stands, some key areas for development are not on the plan and it is not clear how some key priorities will be measured for impact. This has not stopped improvement taking place so far, but it is something that needs to be addressed for future planning.

Teachers now have a more secure understanding of how to plan and assess the curriculum. Consequently, the level of challenge has increased. This is particularly the case for pupils who are working towards or working at the expected standard for their age. Pupils' work in their books and assessment information demonstrate the impact of this. For example, at the end of both key stages 1 and 2 in 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard rose considerably and was similar to the national average. There has not yet been a consistent focus on stretching the most able pupils. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the greater depth standard in key stage 1 and the higher standard in key stage 2 is not high enough.

You have placed a strong emphasis on improving writing across the school. A new handwriting scheme is starting to have a positive impact. Pupils' books showed that their progress in writing is developing well. Where the quality of teaching is strong, pupils' progress is substantial. However, this is not yet consistent across the different classes in the school. There have been clear improvements in the quality of pupils' presentation across the whole school. Owing to teachers' increasingly confident subject knowledge in mathematics, pupils' calculation skills are improving. While there is evidence of them applying their skills, it is not yet done consistently. Pupils lack opportunities to justify and prove their mathematical understanding through reasoning.

The early years leader from the collaboration of schools provides effective guidance to staff in this stage. Staff are reflective and work hard to improve provision. Children are being taught well. Several children's writing books demonstrated good progress over time. The outdoor area has improved and has a deeper focus on children's learning. Staff ask effective questions to help develop children's understanding, without compromising their imagination and exploration. Outcomes are rising and in 2017, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was similar to the national average. Some activities provide children with appropriate challenge, but this is not yet consistent. Occasionally, independent activities do not sufficiently extend or deepen children's thinking.

Attendance levels have dipped in recent years. In 2016 and 2017, attendance was some way below the national average. The attendance lead has put in place a range of new approaches and is thorough in her work. This has started to have an impact and so far this academic year, attendance has risen positively. However, there is still work to do with some families whose children are persistently absent.

The members of the governing body have a good understanding of the key strengths and weaknesses of the school. They use this understanding to provide an effective level of challenge and support to leaders. Governors have a strong commitment to the school and are determined to ensure that it offers consistently good provision. However, they lack a really precise understanding of current attendance and some of the published performance data outcomes. A deeper understanding of some key headline measures will enable even better challenge in the future.

External support

The local authority originally brokered the support of the executive headteacher and the teaching school. This support has been very effective. Leaders from the teaching school and the collaboration of schools have provided useful professional development and support for staff. In addition to this, the local authority provides effective support in specialist areas. For example, it has supported the school with safeguarding, understanding the needs of children who are looked after, early years and governance. The school improvement adviser also visits regularly to support leadership and management, particularly in scrutinising the quality of outcomes. The executive headteacher is positive about the quality of support from the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Meekin
Her Majesty's Inspector