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Ms Catherine Cox
Ilfracombe Church of England Junior School
Princess Avenue
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Devon
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Dear Ms Cox,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ilfracombe Church of England Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 October 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that a cohesive programme for the teaching of phonics is introduced across the school and that all teaching staff are suitably trained.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs (SEN) team and the subject leader for science to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Discussions were also held with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and, by telephone, with a representative of the

local authority.

Accompanied by senior leaders, I observed pupils' learning in all year groups and reviewed pupils' work. I also reviewed a wide range of school documentation, such as curriculum plans and safeguarding records. The school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in November 2016, the deputy headteacher has retired and the headteacher now works on a part-time basis. The leadership team has been restructured to include the headteacher and four assistant headteachers, one of whom assumes the role of headteacher for part of the week. Five new teachers and a small number of teaching assistants have been appointed.

The governing body has been largely stable during this time. The number of pupils on roll has remained around 460.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, leaders have invested much time in developing a new approach to teaching the curriculum. This approach draws together knowledge from a range of subject areas that helps pupils deepen their understanding. Pupils are then able to discuss their understanding and to respond to challenging questions, such as 'Is war justified?' Leaders have also invested in training staff in a common approach to teaching. Together, this is resulting in pupils making more rapid progress in their learning across subjects. For example, in Year 4, pupils drew on their understanding of estimating and rounding from mathematics, practical science experiments, electronic circuit design in technology and different writing styles, in order to present well-reasoned arguments. Pupils show a good awareness of world issues, such as climate change and political systems.

Governors have ensured that resources are available to support these developments. Leaders have selected new textbooks and have purchased equipment, for example mathematics equipment and apparatus to support science teaching. Texts such as those on Antarctica and World War 2 are stimulating and help pupils to know more and broaden their vocabulary. In English, pupils write often and include an increasingly complex range of sentence structures in their work. However, these strengths are not yet commonly seen in pupils' writing in other subjects.

There have been some improvements in spelling because of the work undertaken with the local teaching school. However, leaders recognise that spelling remains a weaker feature of pupils' writing. The knowledge of phonics of the least able pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities, is weak. Leaders are currently exploring the most appropriate approach to the teaching of phonics to ensure that

pupils have a strong foundation for deciphering unfamiliar words and to improve accuracy of spelling. As many of the younger pupils are weak readers, this matter requires urgent attention and requires all teaching staff to be suitably trained to ensure that these pupils catch up swiftly.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that the level of challenge for the most able pupils has increased. Through the new whole-school approach to teaching and the revised curriculum, leaders have planned a wide range of opportunities for the most able pupils to learn more and understand concepts more deeply. Teachers are challenging pupils in their work, ensuring that pupils edit and improve their work, particularly through the use of more ambitious vocabulary. Teachers are making sure that pupils' use of grammar is consistently accurate in their writing. Consequently, the most able pupils are writing at greater length and with increased sophistication.

Governors have ensured that resources have been made available to purchase high-quality, challenging fiction and non-fiction texts. These are helping the most able pupils to increase their knowledge about subjects and about styles of writing. Pupils' work shows that they are using a wide range of vocabulary and various writing techniques that published authors have used. For example, in a story about life during World War 2, Year 6 pupils incorporated dialogue into their writing to communicate historical facts. The most able are increasingly confident in gathering information from one genre, for example a narrative tale, and retelling the same information through a different style of writing, such as a diary entry.

Teachers are ensuring that the most able pupils are secure in the mathematical knowledge and skills that are expected for their age. They are planning learning, which is helping pupils to deepen their understanding so that they can apply this effectively when faced with problems to solve. The most able pupils are working with increasing accuracy and precision.

In their work in other subjects, most-able pupils construct debates and present well-thought-through arguments to express their own views, backed up by facts. This can be seen where Year 4 pupils draw on their research and practical experiments on sustainable energy.

The previous inspection identified that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities were not making the progress that they should. Leaders have carried out initial assessments of the needs of all pupils who may have SEN and/or disabilities. Since April 2018, leaders have provided training for teachers and, as a result, teachers have a greater awareness of the broad range of pupils' needs. Leaders recognise that this work is still in its infancy and that staff need support to identify and understand some needs more precisely.

Leaders have alerted teachers to resources that are available to help them plan learning to meet pupils' needs more closely. They have also changed pupil

groupings so that pupils with particular needs can be taught in small groups in order to receive teaching that is more closely matched to their needs. Leaders are checking the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities regularly and each pupil now has a 'My Plan' that outlines their needs, sets targets and details strategies that teachers can use. However, the targets set, and the progress measures used, are not precise enough to provide the quality of information that pupils, parents, teachers and leaders need.

External support

Leaders and governors are drawing on a wide range of support that is ensuring that the improvements needed, which were identified at the previous inspection, are being tackled successfully.

Working with specialist consultants, leaders have successfully designed and implemented an initial set of topics for pupils to study. They have also received support from the local authority to improve both the quality of pupils' writing and its assessment. Support from the North Devon Teaching School Alliance has helped in improving pupils' accuracy of spelling, particularly for the most able. Consequently, pupils are writing at a standard more in line with that expected for their age. A greater proportion of the most able pupils are now working at the higher standard.

Training aligned with the school's adopted approach to the teaching of mathematics has been provided by a commercial company and is ongoing.

Leaders with specific responsibilities for SEN and disabilities have benefited from specialist training by the local authority, which has increased their understanding about autistic spectrum disorder and dyslexia.

Leaders are aware of the need to access additional external support in the teaching of phonics.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland

Her Majesty's Inspector