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Mrs Christine Tonkins
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Foundation Primary School
Hampton Road
Stansted
Essex
CM24 8FE

Dear Mrs Tonkins

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

Following my visit to your school on 23 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- investigate the reasons for the slower rates of progress for pupils in Year 3 to identify appropriate action
- make sure that lesson observation records make clear the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress and that subject-specific points of feedback to teachers are linked explicitly to the teacher standards
- confirm that assessment is accurate and rigorous through cross-moderation with a wider range of schools, including one where standards are high
- ensure that the support it is receiving from the local authority and independently commissioned advisers is coordinated.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the Governing Body, representatives of the local authority and an independent school improvement adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Brief visits were made to four lessons during an hour of joint observation with senior leaders. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have adapted the school improvement plan to address the areas for improvement identified by the last inspection. Importantly, the plan also includes other important aspects identified through self-evaluation. Senior and middle leaders and governors are determined to secure a good judgement at the next inspection and very clear in how this will be achieved.

Pupils' attainment and progress are checked frequently through meetings with class teachers to review the progress of every pupil. The school checks the consistency and accuracy of assessments by comparing pupils' work across classes and with another school, but could strengthen this process further by working with a school where standards are high. Phase and subject leaders help to monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on learning. Senior leaders and governors analyse assessment data to identify trends in the performance of different groups of pupils and are now able to report on the impact being made by the use of extra government funding to support certain groups of pupils.

The school's internal assessments show that pupils in Years 5 and 6 are on track to achieve good progress by the end of Key Stage 2. Data from the last two years suggests that pupils make slower than expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics during Year 3. The reasons are not clear, but may relate to how well pupils are prepared by their Key Stage 1 experience as much as how they are taught in Year 3. Current Year 4 pupils have made up the lost ground in reading and writing, but only partly in mathematics.

The quality of teaching is being improved by a variety of means. Some teachers have been paired up to share good practice. One teacher has attended an outstanding teacher course and is now working with a colleague from the course to devise professional development that will benefit both their schools. The literacy and mathematics subject leaders are already working with colleagues to prepare for the new national curriculum and to raise expectations. Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been reorganised to ensure that children have more opportunities to learn about phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and to develop their writing skills in readiness for moving into Key Stage 1.

Much teaching is already good, but leaders recognise scope for further improvement, for example in stretching the most-able pupils and in securing greater consistency in

marking. Feedback to teachers from lesson observations and checks of pupils' work is pertinent and includes an appropriate subject-specific element, but the record sheet used does not emphasise enough the impact of teaching on learning. The national teacher standards are used well to set performance management targets, but the links are not always made explicit in the feedback from lesson observations.

The governing body is increasing its involvement in monitoring and in holding senior leaders to account. The school improvement plan identifies a specific role for governors in monitoring progress on the various action points. Governors are increasingly astute in their questioning of senior leaders.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. The school has agreed to provide regular updates about pupils' attainment and progress and the quality of teaching. If the rate of improvement is sustained, consideration will be given to bringing forward the next inspection.

External support

The school benefits from good external support and challenge. Guidance is sought from the local authority adviser and from a separately commissioned school improvement adviser. It would help the school if these two sources of advice were able to work more closely together. A Strategic Education Partnership has been established to bring together a group of governors, senior leaders with diocesan and local authority representatives to review the school's effectiveness. This is helping to strengthen governance. The school receives good support from a literacy adviser. The Early Years Foundation Stage is shortly to be reviewed by a local authority team. Good links have been made with other schools to share expertise and to plan for the new national curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Essex and the Director of Education for the Diocese of Chelmsford.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott
Her Majesty's Inspector