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27 October 2014

Amanda Healey  
Headteacher  
St Bartholomew's CofE Primary School  
Ann Street  
Brighton  
BN1 4GP

Dear Mrs Healey

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Bartholomew's CofE Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 24 October 2014, 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 July 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection, and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- set realistic and challenging targets for each year group, for different groups of pupils and for individual pupils, aiming for a rapid increase in the proportion achieving age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics
- ensure that the school's improvement plan:
  - sets out clearly how, over the next 18 months, the school will take effective action to be judged good at its next full inspection
  - includes for each area requiring improvement, logically sequenced actions, training and resources, including use of leaders' time

- shows how leaders, including governors, will check actions are accomplished, and how success will be measured
- refers to better pupil achievement as the key indicator of success
- make effective links with good or outstanding schools serving similar communities to support rapid improvement in the school's leadership and teaching
- review the actions planned after the review of governance, to ensure that priority is given to checking the progress of the school and holding the headteacher to account.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, a governor and representatives from the local authority. Her Majesty's Inspector toured the school with senior leaders and considered a range of documents. This included the school's improvement plan, records of checks on teaching and pupils' work, records of training and staff meetings, the review of governance, records of governors' meetings and information about local authority support

## **Context**

Since the inspection, one teacher has left the school and a maternity leave has commenced. These posts are covered by temporary staff.

## **Main findings**

Helpful work has been done to create a new system to record, check and analyse pupils' progress. However, this has not been used effectively to set appropriately challenging targets for pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. These targets are too low to ensure the improvement which is required, especially for younger pupils. The school has not used the new system well enough to check the achievement of pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding to support pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who are looked after). Specific targets have not been set to close any gaps between the attainment of this group and other pupils.

New 'challenge corners' have been developed in classrooms. The school identifies this as a key action to stimulate the most able pupils. However, this strategy does not feature in the school's improvement plan and is insufficient to deliver the required improvement. In addition, the quality varies considerably, ranging from highly imaginative and thought provoking displays to the simple provision of puzzle books, or challenge cards without the resources needed. Leaders have not addressed this variation.

Expectations for teachers' marking have been clarified, but marking in too many pupils' books is still not of the standard required. Too much remains cursory, with comments which do not tell pupils how well they have achieved. Some marking, including by leaders, is untidily written and includes spelling mistakes. In many cases, the 'next steps' which the school is promoting are not provided, or are too basic to be helpful. These weaknesses in marking have been overlooked when senior leaders check pupils' books. There are a small number of notable exceptions, but these strengths in teaching have not been recognised sufficiently by leaders and are not being used well enough as an example for others.

The school is right to celebrate the success of improved results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014. However, this improvement was achieved through effective and focussed teaching in Year 6, and does not reflect a successful wider strategy to raise achievement throughout the school.

The school has identified that the way teachers implement the current mathematics scheme limits pupils' progress. Nevertheless, dealing with this issue is not a feature of the improvement plan, which does not outline well enough how teachers' skills and knowledge will be checked and improved, or how any existing strengths in mathematics teaching will be identified and shared.

To improve pupils' engagement, the school is promoting the characteristics of a good learner, for example, perseverance, listening and thinking. Year 6 writing, helpfully illustrating these qualities, is prominently displayed in the corridor. There is evidence that pupils have caught the value of this idea and are beginning to think of themselves in this way. However, the quality of classroom displays varies too much across different years, with some limited to pre-printed posters provided by senior leaders. This inconsistency has not been challenged sufficiently by leaders.

There is a lack of determination among leaders to tackle weaknesses in teaching so it improves rapidly. The quality of teaching remains too variable. The school has extended the range of activities used to evaluate teaching. As well as observing lessons, leaders now look at pupils' work and teachers' assessments. However, they do not consider these adequately when judging teaching, leading to over-optimistic views and too little challenge and support for teachers. Leaders do not check if teachers are making the improvements required by the last inspection.

The action plan does not focus closely enough on improving the impact of leadership across the school, nor show how leaders' skills will be developed in vital areas such as observing teaching and providing feedback to staff. Leaders with teaching responsibilities are allocated time away from the classroom, but the use of this time is not planned or checked sufficiently.

The school's improvement plan is not sufficiently practical or detailed. It refers to each of the areas for improvement in a suitable format, but lacks the necessary

information about what is to be done in each area, the training and resources needed, including leadership time, or how success will be measured. Not all actions being taken are included in the plan.

Records of governors' meetings after the inspection indicate a reluctance to accept and act promptly on its full findings. However, following the review of governance, relevant actions have now been identified. The governing body has decided to reconstitute to a smaller and more efficient size, and to challenge all its members to make an effective contribution. Governors have not yet prioritised their actions appropriately, and the weaknesses in the action plan undermine their ability to check the school is improving, or hold the headteacher fully to account.

### **External support**

The local authority has provided sustained support to the school over the last 12 months, including from a range of appropriate consultants. Regular review meetings have been held, enabling the local authority to identify that the school was making too little progress, leading to more support, particularly to improve teaching. The local authority also conducted the useful review of governance, and arranged expert support for the development of systems to track pupils' progress. However, the local authority did not identify the weaknesses in the school's improvement plan, and has not acted with sufficient urgency to arrange a suitable senior partner to work alongside the headteacher to develop leadership throughout the school.

As it was not possible to meet with the full governing body during the inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector will meet a wider range at a subsequent visit.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Brighton and Hove.

Yours sincerely

Siân Thornton  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**