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Charlotte Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holly Hill Methodist Church of England Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 21 March 2016, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. 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 that were identified at the last section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- make sure that pupils reach the standards expected for their age in English and mathematics
- ensure that senior leaders identify the precise actions that teachers need to take to help different groups of pupils make faster progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and three governors to discuss the actions taken since the previous monitoring inspection. I also met with a representative from Birmingham Education Partnership and the headteacher of Colmore Infant School. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the latest information about pupils'

achievement and feedback to staff following lesson observations and reviews of pupils' work. You and the deputy headteacher joined me on brief visits to all classes to talk to pupils and to look at their work.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, three teachers have left the school. One of these teachers was responsible for early years and the second for managing English and key stage 1. In January 2016, the governing body appointed an assistant headteacher to lead improvements in English. It also appointed a teacher to oversee the early years. This teacher will be joining the school in April. In September, the headteacher arranged for staff from the Colmore Teaching School Alliance to provide support and training for staff at Holly Hill. This support is set to continue until the end of the summer term.

Main findings

Following my previous monitoring inspection in November 2015, you and the deputy headteacher took immediate action to improve all aspects of the school's work. In partnership with the Colmore Infant Head of School, you prioritised the actions that needed to be taken and revised the school improvement plan. This plan identifies the precise actions that will be taken to raise pupils' achievement. The plan also contains clear measures of success, so that governors can check the impact of the actions within the plan.

You, the deputy headteacher and staff have benefited from working alongside senior leaders and staff from the Colmore Teaching School Alliance, and other local primary and nursery schools. In addition to arranging suitable support and training for yourself, the deputy headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants, you have taken appropriate and timely action in response to weaknesses in teaching. This combination of support and challenge has strengthened leadership, led to improvements in teaching and had a beneficial impact on pupils' learning. Your latest information about pupils' achievement and work in pupils' books shows that pupils are making faster progress than in the past, with some making good rates of progress. The gaps between the standards attained by boys and girls and between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are also closing. Nevertheless, you rightly recognise that further work is required to ensure that pupils reach the standards expected for their age and make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

The systems for reviewing the work of teachers and teaching assistants have improved significantly. Senior leaders regularly check how well staff are implementing whole-school policies and helping pupils to learn. Senior leaders have introduced individual learning and development plans for teachers. These plans record the actions that teachers need to take to raise pupils' achievement, the support that will be made available and when senior leaders will check that the agreed actions have been implemented. Although the individual feedback that staff receive from senior leaders is generally helpful, it does not identify the precise actions that teachers need

to take to help different groups of pupils to make faster progress.

Senior leaders keep a watchful eye on the achievement of pupils. They meet regularly with staff to discuss and review the progress of individuals, and to make changes to the curriculum. For instance, you recognised that boys were not achieving as well as girls with their writing. In response to this, staff started to plan writing activities that interested all pupils. During this inspection, a group of boys and girls in Year 2 were particularly keen to talk to me and show me their writing about the rainforest. This writing was of a good quality, and included interesting and relevant facts about the rainforest.

All teachers make sure that pupils know what they are expected to learn by the end of the lesson. Teachers and teaching assistants also use questions well to extend pupils' thinking and to promote discussion. Teachers, including those working with pupils in the early years, are getting better at using the information about what pupils already know and can do to plan appropriate activities for pupils of different abilities. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are writing more regularly, and are increasingly using punctuation and grammar accurately. In mathematics, pupils are using their knowledge of number well to answer questions with confidence. You have correctly identified the need for staff to concentrate more on helping pupils to improve their spelling and to deepen pupils' mathematical understanding.

Governors have benefited from the training organised by the Methodist Circuit and diocese. During meetings, governors are focusing on the difference that leaders and teachers are making to pupils' achievement. Senior leaders make sure that governors receive concise information about pupils' achievement. This enables the governing body to keep a check on the progress of different pupils and to examine the difference that additional funding is making to disadvantaged pupils.

External support

The intensive level of support provided by the Colmore Teaching School Alliance has helped to strengthen leadership, improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Similarly, the Methodist Circuit and diocese training has led to improvements in governance. The Birmingham Education Partnership oversees monitoring progress meetings which provide leaders and governors with a suitable level of challenge and support. Discussions during these meetings have helped leaders and governors to identify and prioritise future actions.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector