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Mrs Angela Anderton
Headteacher
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Upton Street
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Dear Mrs Anderton

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

Following my visit to your school on 13 April 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. Please also pass my thanks on to your pupils and staff for making me feel welcome in the school. Your pupils are a delight to talk to and you should be very proud of them.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was judged to require special measures.

You, other senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. However, these actions are not yet increasing the pace of improvements in pupils' achievement rapidly enough as a result of the deep-rooted problems you are tackling. I recommend that the school should be subject to further monitoring before the next inspection. You and the other leaders, including subject leaders, should take further action to:

- more effectively integrate the regular monitoring of teaching and learning, the analysis of information on pupils' achievement and the frequent meetings with class teachers to review pupils' progress to provide a more coherent picture of the effectiveness of the actions being taken to improve the school

- improve the quality of pupils' learning in the foundation subjects and use these subjects more effectively to develop pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body, the foundation governor representing the diocese of Gloucester and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's raising attainment (action) plan was evaluated. We discussed the progress reports from the local authority project group and reports on visits undertaken by an external consultant. We made visits together, and some with the deputy headteacher, to each of the six classes. During these visits I looked at pupils' work and talked with them about it, including the work on display in the classrooms.

Context

The headteacher took up post in September 2014, following a period with four interim headteachers. A new governing body was established at that time. The current chair of the governing body joined as an additional governor, initiated by the local authority.

Many of the children who join the school at the start of Year 3 transfer from the local infant school. However, the school has a very high level of mobility with many other pupils joining the school at times other than at the start of Year 3. Around one third of current pupils were not in the school at the start of Year 3. Many of these pupils join the school with very little, if any, spoken or written English. A significant proportion also have other, sometimes complex, needs.

The number of pupils in each year group varies from year to year. This means that, currently, there are two classes for each of Years 4 and 6, but only one class in each of Years 3 and 5. This means manageable class sizes in some years and very large classes in others.

Main findings

You have provided clarity about what needed to be done to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement and about what continues to need to be improved. Extensive training for all teachers, and targeted training for some, has led to improvements in the overall quality of teaching. The impact of the work you have done can be seen in all six classes. In the Year 3 and 4 classes, pupils' work shows that a good proportion of each class is on track to do well in reading, writing and mathematics. This is most noticeable for those pupils who have been in the school since the start of Year 3. Class teachers now have reliable information about these pupils' starting points when they join Year 3. In the Year 5 and 6 classes, pupils'

work shows that significant progress has been made by each pupil since the start of the year. However, because of poor progress in the past, much of their work is not at the level it should be. The work of those pupils who joined the school late shows that their progress is initially slow but improves rapidly as their English develops or as their confidence is restored.

All of the areas identified as requiring improvement in the most recent inspection report are being addressed and progress has been made, although more still needs to be done. Teachers' expectations of the level of pupils' work are higher and the feedback they provide for pupils is clearer and helps them to improve. Pupils present their work more clearly and take more pride in it. Pupils are increasingly confident in solving mathematical problems as a result of the extensive work you have undertaken to improve teaching and learning in mathematics. However, this is more noticeable in the work of pupils in Years 3 and 4. Some of those in Year 6, for example, find it difficult to work out clear strategies for solving mathematical problems and are not producing work at the standard expected for this year group.

Understandably, you, supported by other senior and subject leaders, have placed a strong emphasis on improving pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills. The intention was that these skills would be further developed through work in the foundation subjects. This has not worked as well as you intended. Pupils' work in these subjects does not show good development of these skills. Teachers' feedback to pupils on, for example, their writing in the foundation subjects is not consistent with what they provide in the pupils' writing journals. Additionally, it is not clear what learning is expected in the foundation subjects and, consequently, learning is often shallow and the pace too slow.

Your and other senior leaders' checking of pupils' progress and monitoring of the quality of teaching is frequent and systematic; pupil progress meetings are held with each class teacher about every six weeks. In the records of these meetings there is a good focus on the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils, such as the most able and those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as the class as a whole. The progress of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is checked very carefully to make sure they receive the support they need. The checking of each pupil's progress is underpinned by a detailed understanding of their particular circumstances. You, class teachers and other senior leaders know the pupils well. In addition to these progress meetings, frequent short visits to classrooms, formal observations of lessons and checks on pupils' work are carried out continuously. Data and information on pupils' progress and achievement are also gathered and analysed systematically. However, to make these arrangements more effective:

- the links between them need to be clearer to provide a precise picture of the impact of the actions you and others are taking
- subject leaders need to be more involved.

Pupils' attendance overall and for all groups has improved significantly to be at least in line with the national average; this is a real success. You are taking appropriate actions to address the poor attendance of a very small number of pupils.

The raising attainment plan was developed with the local authority. It clearly identifies the actions required to improve the school and address the improvement points identified in the July 2015 inspection report. Progress against these actions is monitored frequently by the local authority project group. This group is led by a local authority school improvement officer and usefully includes you, the deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and other governors. However, the records of the project group meetings show too little indication of the impact of the actions taken on raising pupils' achievement. The plan shows how the actions will be monitored but not how their impact will be evaluated.

The governing body provides you with a good balance of support and challenge. Members know what needs to be done and are clear that it will take time for the actions you have taken to have full impact across all year groups. They could help you more by placing more emphasis on a sharper evaluation of the impact of actions on raising pupils' achievement.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority set up a project group to monitor and support the school's leaders when it was subject to special measures. This group has continued since the July 2015 inspection which judged that the school requires improvement. This group provides frequent and systematic feedback on progress against the actions in the school's raising attainment plan. This analysis of the school's progress is used to initiate additional support for the headteacher, such as the recent visits by an external consultant and links with other schools. The reports from this group provide a useful summary of the actions that have been taken but lack precision in evaluating the impact of these on improving pupils' achievement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of children's services for Gloucestershire and the director of education of the Gloucester diocese.

Yours sincerely

James Sage
Her Majesty's Inspector