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21 April 2017

Mrs V Humbles  
St Mary's Church of England Primary School  
Dellsome Lane  
North Mymms  
Hatfield  
Hertfordshire  
AL9 7NE

Dear Mrs Humbles

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

Following my visit to your school on 20 March 2017, 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 September 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2016 the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- include in its action plan clear measures for success, specific timescales and detailed information about who will monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions taken
- rigorously raise the expectations and aspirations of parents regarding the importance of school attendance so that attendance meets national standards
- ensure that middle leaders monitor and evaluate their subjects effectively

- robustly monitor and evaluate teaching in every area of the curriculum to ensure the improvement of pupil outcomes.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your acting deputy headteachers, three middle leaders, the local authority adviser, four governors, including the chair of governors, the Diocese of St Albans education officer and a national lead of education (NLE) working with the school, to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection.

I spoke formally with one group of pupils and informally with others when observing the school's work. Together with you, I observed lessons and looked at pupils' work in books and on display. I scrutinised subject action plans, local authority and subject adviser reports, governor meeting minutes, NLE reports to the school action group and a report of the review of governance. I scrutinised the school development plan.

## **Context**

As at the time of the September 2016 inspection, you continue to lead the school. Your deputy headteacher is currently on maternity leave. Two acting deputy headteachers have been carrying out this role since December 2016. This arrangement will continue until December 2017.

The school's governing body continues to provide governance for the school. The chair of governors at the time of the September 2016 inspection resigned from both the post and the governing body shortly after the inspection report was published. The vice-chair of governors was appointed at that time as chair of the governing body.

## **Main findings**

You, together with your team of senior and middle leaders and governors, accepted the inspection findings. Although staff morale was low after the inspection, staff have focused successfully on the aspects of the school's work that need to improve. Subsequently, staff morale has improved.

This monitoring inspection confirms your views and those of the governing body that there is still work to do to address the inspection findings fully. Your analysis suggests it will take a further 18 months to fully embed improvements and ensure that pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching are securely good.

Your action plan is robust and focuses appropriately on the weaknesses identified during the September 2016 inspection. Suitable actions are identified but

timescales, responsibilities and impact measures are not currently sharp enough to ensure rapid improvement. Since the inspection, you have reshaped the structure of middle leadership from subject-specific teams to subject leadership which has streamlined the focus on improvement. Although subject leaders have clear action plans that link to whole-school development priorities empowering their leadership, they do not currently play a full part in leading improvements. They are not fully involved in the monitoring, evaluation and review of strategic changes to their subject areas. As a result, they do not have a clear enough understanding of the impact of the changes that have been implemented or of the next steps needed to improve practice.

Improvements since the September 2016 inspection are evident. The early years provision has undergone rapid change. Leaders have used local authority support to inform their understanding of how to ensure good teaching and learning in the Reception class. As a result, the structure of activities, the heightened focus on developing key skills and the development of staff expertise have improved measurably. An increased proportion of children are on track to reach a good level of development at the end of the early years.

The previous inspection report noted the over-generous evaluation of the quality of teaching by senior leaders. You now have in place a robust monitoring cycle and this is ensuring a clearer understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the quality of teaching. You have drawn innovatively on a range of external and internal support to drive improvements. These have included visits to other schools and the use of the expertise of subject advisers. You identified issues with the way teachers made their expectations of pupils' learning clear and with how effectively they used questioning to enhance learning. You are providing good support to teachers to ensure that the quality of teaching improves. Your observations of teaching and pupils' work undertaken in the autumn and spring terms have helped improve teaching, particularly in Reception and key stage 1. You support staff well. You are aware that the quality of teaching is still not fully consistent across the school and have introduced a robust programme of training and support. The impact of this is too early to measure.

The inspection report highlighted the underachievement of pupils in upper key stage 2 and teaching is still not of sufficient quality to secure the rapid improvement necessary. Changes to the curriculum design have meant that pupils have more opportunities to develop their writing skills in geography, history and science. However, this is still inconsistent across the school, particularly at upper key stage 2. Leaders have supported teachers to strengthen their understanding of pupils' starting points to inform appropriate challenge in the setting of tasks. This is evident in many classes but not in all, particularly also in upper key stage 2. You have appropriate strategies in place to address these concerns. Regular internal and external moderation of pupils' work has helped to confirm that pupils across the year groups are on track to meet, and in some cases exceed, age-related expectations in the core skills.

Although not raised as a priority in the inspection report, the attendance of all pupils is below the national average. You are working hard to encourage pupils to attend through a rewards system. Additionally, you remind parents of the importance of their children's attendance regularly in the school's newsletter. You monitor and record pupils' attendance diligently but the impact of these strategies is not yet seen in reducing the above-average absence rates.

Classrooms are well resourced and pupils use the learning materials to support their learning well. Pupils' work is openly celebrated through colourful displays. For example, the Reception classroom has an area to display children's models which changes daily to demonstrate their most recent work.

Pupils are very well behaved. They listen well to instructions and engage well with their learning tasks. You have introduced a range of strategies to support pupils' emotional well-being and to help them regulate their own behaviour. As a consequence, incidents of poor behaviour have reduced since the previous inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has identified the school as one requiring a high level of support and an adviser reviews its work regularly. In addition, the local authority has supported improvements in the quality of teaching and learning through subject adviser visits and training. These advisers provide useful reports on the quality of the school's work. In addition, a national leader of education has provided you with coaching and guidance. Her reports also provide challenge and support in improving the school. The local authority and national leader of education support will continue for the foreseeable future.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Aykin  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**