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Mrs Sarah Bridgman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bridgman

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

Following my visit to your school on 13 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.

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:

- improve action plans so that there are clear milestones that leaders use rigorously to ensure that momentum is maintained and school improvement remains on track
- evaluate the impact of key actions rigorously so that leaders always have an accurate view of the school's performance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, two subject leaders, two representatives of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. I considered a range of documentation, including the school development plan, the report for the external review of governance, the minutes of governing body meetings, and the school's most recent questionnaire to parents. Together, we observed teaching in all classes and looked at the work on display and in pupils' books. I spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the emails that parents had sent into the school.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in September 2016, two class teachers have left the school, and two teachers have been recruited to teach the classes until July 2017.

Main findings

Your drive and commitment to improve the achievement for pupils, identified in the previous inspection report, is clearly evident. You are working effectively with all staff to raise the expectations of what pupils should achieve, particularly in key stage 2. Higher expectations of the quality of teaching are evident in lessons, pupils' books and the displays around the school. Staff have received focused support and more rigorous procedures to manage teachers' performance have been put in place.

The school development plan is sharply focused on the issues identified at the previous inspection and it is suitably underpinned by subject leaders' action plans. The plan identifies clearly the senior leaders and governors who are responsible for monitoring the progress being made by the school, as well as some measurable success criteria. However, we agreed that this could be even more effective if interim milestones were included to help governors check progress at regular intervals and ensure that the school is improving quickly enough in short periods of time.

The quality of teaching is improving. There is a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to quicken the progress that pupils are making in English and mathematics. You have reviewed systems for checking on the quality of teaching and learning since the recent inspection. You and subject leaders are regularly observing lessons, looking at work in pupils' books and considering information relating to pupils' achievements. Subject leaders are now playing a more effective role in supporting you to drive up standards.

Reflecting on changes since September 2016, pupils spoke enthusiastically about how they enjoy their lessons because they have 'loads to do now' and that they 'write more'. Pupils like the regular opportunities they have to review their own

work against age-related expectations and to respond to teachers' feedback. They were proud to show me the work in their books, which demonstrates clear progress. One pupil commented, 'We have to think in our heads more now: I like it!'

You have developed the school's curriculum and it now meets government requirements. Pupils have access to a range of engaging experiences across all subjects and clearly enjoy their lessons. You and subject leaders are ensuring that pupils have the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills to achieve well across all subjects.

Governors are committed to the school's improvement and are developing their skills in order to give you the high-quality support and challenge that they should. The external review of governance, following the previous inspection, was very helpful in identifying what needs to improve. Governors appreciate the clear steer the review provided.

The training they have received has increased governors' knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Through your detailed reports for governors and their own focused visits linked to the school's priorities, they are developing a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The minutes of recent governing body meetings demonstrate that governors are now holding you more to account for the school's improvement. We agreed that you and the governors need to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions you have taken and identify the next steps for improvement.

You have improved the way the school informs and consults with parents and carers, including regularly sending newsletters, texts and reminders out to them. The newly designed website meets statutory requirements and gives a full picture of all aspects of the school. The parent forum meetings are well attended and you have used the suggestions to make changes, for example providing workshops for parents and carers about phonics and mathematics. At the termly consultation meetings, parents and carers now receive a written summary of the progress their child has made and ideas for supporting learning at home. Parents and carers appreciate the way you have sought to develop ways to communicate with them and told me that this has 'improved by 100%'.

External support

The local authority is providing effective support. Local authority officers responded quickly to the findings of the recent inspection by increasing their level of support to the school. Local authority consultants have been deployed to support staff and the improvement partner makes regular visits to check on progress and to challenge you on the impact of your leadership. Your school is part of the local primary and small-school clusters, which provides suitable opportunities to work collaboratively on school improvement with other local schools.

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

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector