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Ms Amanda McGarrigle
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
St Mary's Road
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Kent
BR8 7BU

Dear Ms McGarrigle

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

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 2015, 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 April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2015, 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, three members of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and records of monitoring by senior leaders were reviewed. Brief visits were made to all classes to see the school in action. The school's website and checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were also reviewed.

Context

Since the inspection in April 2015, three teachers have left the school. They were replaced by two newly qualified teachers and one teacher in the second year of teaching. There are two new governors and a new clerk to the governing body.

Main findings

You are passionate about improving your school because you care deeply about each and every pupil, and want them to do as well as possible. Teachers, likewise, are committed to providing the right support and stretch for their pupils. Everyone is aiming high and knows there is no room for excuses.

In summer 2015, the school's end of Year 6 results greatly improved in reading, writing and mathematics. You are determined to build on this so that current pupils do just as well or better. You now expect teachers to focus more closely on challenging the most-able pupils. Pupils who are struggling receive better-targeted support to help them catch up. You monitor teacher performance more rigorously and provide useful development points to help teachers to improve. However, it is too early to measure the impact of these actions.

You are not afraid to tackle weaknesses in teaching so that pupils get the best deal. The new teachers who started in September have higher expectations, which has strengthened the staff team. However, they lack experience: you know you must provide the right support for them so that all pupils do as well as they should. You sensibly allocated each new teacher a mentor to help them settle in. New teachers also attend relevant training to develop their skills. The new 'non-negotiables' checklist helps all teachers know exactly what you expect, and is helping to iron out inconsistency in the quality of teaching between classes.

The marking policy has been reviewed and all teachers now take the same approach to providing helpful feedback. Pupils say the extra tasks which teachers set to help them learn from their mistakes are 'good, because we know how to do it the next time'. In some classes, teachers have begun to improve the quality of pupils' writing. This is because they provide more opportunities for pupils to think about their ideas and express them orally before they write them down. This provides an effective model of good practice on which you intend to build. Pupils are rightly proud of their better-quality work.

Teachers in the literacy and mathematics subject teams are focused on the right areas to improve pupils' progress. For example, there is greater emphasis on developing pupils' understanding when reading. Pupils are selected more carefully to attend small groups to work on their comprehension skills. Staff report that the wider variety of books means that pupils enjoy reading more. However, information is not yet available to check how well all this is improving pupils' progress.

You have ambitious plans to help the school be judged 'good' at its next inspection. However, while you can articulate what you want to do, your written action plan is muddled. Consequently, it is not an effective tool to drive improvement. You are aware that you need to modify your plan so that it sets out exactly what you are aiming to achieve, the precise steps you will take to get there and the milestones along the way. You know you need to ensure the pace of change is managed well so that actions have time to embed and improvements may be sustained.

Governors share your aspirations for the school. The governing body has been strengthened by two additional governors to share the work. Governors have a better grasp on how well the school operates because they meet more regularly to check the progress of improvements. The school's website now provides more useful information for parents and meets statutory requirements.

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

You now work more closely with the local authority advisers who provide beneficial support to drive improvement. For example, governors received useful training to ensure that they ask the right questions. I am pleased that you send teachers to look at good practice in other schools so they bring back fresh ideas to use at St Mary's.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Kent and the Diocese of Rochester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector