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15 May 2018

Ms Katie Blood
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Blood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Bartholomew's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 May 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- sharpen the school's improvement plan, by:
 - including more precise success criteria to measure the school's progress
 - developing a monitoring schedule to ensure that timely checks are made and followed up
- build on developments in mathematics teaching to strengthen provision in other subjects, especially writing
- review the use of information about achievement and attendance so that:
 - leaders measure more precisely what pupils know and understand at key points within the year
 - leaders can demonstrate where attendance has improved for individual pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection I met with you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders and teachers to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. I spoke to a group of pupils and reviewed a range of documents that you provided, including the school improvement plan and your self-evaluation. You and I also visited classrooms to see pupils at work and look at their books. I spoke to parents at the school gate and checked the school's single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection in September 2016 there have been some important changes. Following a period of temporary leadership by an executive headteacher, you were appointed as substantive headteacher in April 2017. Only one governor remains from the original board, with all others appointed since the last inspection. A new chair of the governing body took up post in April 2018.

Main findings

Since your appointment you have worked hard to build effective relationships across the school. You have successfully developed staff trust after a period of instability and helped everyone to understand their role in raising standards. The staff team is now pulling together with a shared sense of purpose and direction. As one teacher commented, 'Everybody's up for it'.

Your comprehensive school improvement plan systematically tackles the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have made sure staff responsibilities are clear and have set realistic timescales for improvement. However, your success criteria are not always specific enough for leaders and governors to check exactly how well the school is doing. In addition, the plan does not show how and when actions will be monitored. You agreed that it would be useful to develop a more detailed monitoring schedule to help keep actions on track.

You have successfully helped pupils to understand what the school is aiming for, and their part in its improvement. They confidently showed me posters which remind them to SOAR (Succeed as mathematicians; On time at school; Achieve outstanding progress; Remember to follow our 'golden rules'). One pupil explained how this reminds her that, 'I come to school to learn and succeed.'

You have increased everyone's focus on teaching and learning. Pupils were keen to inform me about the 'winged learners' and how proud they feel to get a sticker for characteristics such as perseverance or listening well. Year 6 pupils were also delighted to tell me how the mathematics revision club (where they are provided with snacks and hot chocolate) is 'definitely working' because they have improved their 'scores' in tests.

Together with senior leaders, you make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching through your regular checks on teachers' work. You recognise that a more structured approach to this work will help you ensure that teachers act on your useful feedback. However, some teaching still requires improvement. You have implemented a range of strategies to tackle this, including focused support from consultants and helpful staff training sessions. You are rightly determined to improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good.

Teachers understand that you will hold them accountable for pupils' progress. They say that you have ensured that assessment information is now more accurate. You track the progress of different groups of pupils carefully, including in the early years, to identify any trends and where pupils need extra help. However, although there is evidence of some faster progress, outcomes remain variable across the school because teaching is not consistently good. You currently check pupils' attainment and progress, taking into account the full year's curriculum. We discussed how you might use your information to measure pupils' knowledge and understanding more precisely during the course of the year, based on what has been taught to date.

With much to tackle, you have sensibly concentrated on priority areas first. This has included developing better teaching approaches in mathematics. Teachers now take more account of what pupils already know and understand when planning mathematics lessons. They no longer have preconceptions about pupils' ability. They say this has removed the ceiling on learning. Where this is most successful, pupils are starting to make more rapid progress. Pupils reported that they enjoy choosing for themselves tasks at the right level of difficulty. They were clear that this makes learning 'more fun'. As teachers are becoming more confident in teaching mathematics, you correctly intend to build on this success to improve outcomes in other subjects, especially writing.

Alongside developing teaching, you are strengthening the role of subject leaders. Starting with mathematics and English, you are making sure leaders have the right training and development to be effective in their roles. As a result, they are more confident to lead staff training, and check standards in their subject. This has helped them understand where the emerging strengths are, and what needs further work. You have reallocated leadership roles for other subjects. Development of these middle leaders is another of your key priorities.

Nearly all governors were replaced after the last inspection. Governors rightly prioritised the recruitment of a new headteacher, which took up a great deal of time, as well as setting up a new committee structure. This all slowed the commissioning of a review of governance. However, this is now under way. Governors have a good balance of skills to help them support the school's work. They have undertaken the right training to prepare them well for their different roles. They have also visited to see the school in action, to help them ask well-informed questions. Governing body

minutes indicate that governors are tenacious in asking for the right information to challenge leaders.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the positive changes to behaviour. One said, 'It's gone from level one to about level 50.' They reported that changes to lunchtime supervision mean, 'It feels more safe.' They were proud to show off the badges they have earned for 'pupil points' and keen to discuss the motivating rewards offered for good behaviour. You acknowledge that a small minority of pupils still present challenging behaviour, but we saw no disruption in lessons or around the school during my visit. Teachers told me they appreciate the strategies and support which you provide for behaviour management. Parents agree that there is a positive atmosphere in the school, saying you have made welcome improvements.

Children in the early years are provided with a good range of opportunities for writing. During my visit, they were enjoying their work on worms. Activities such as labelling worm diagrams and writing an invitation to worms to attend a party were inspiring children to write independently. For example, one child made a label for his 'worm house' and another took an envelope to write a letter to her mum.

You are working hard to improve attendance. Your wide range of strategies includes meeting with individual families, as well as raising the profile of good attendance in newsletters. Pupils are motivated by prizes for the best class attendance, such as a visit to a café, sponsored by local business. Although attendance remains far too low, you can show some improvement for many individuals. You recognise that it would be helpful to analyse this further to evaluate which strategies have worked well.

External support

An external review of pupil premium funding was carried out following the previous inspection. You have updated the necessary information on your website, which now meets requirements. Teachers say that disadvantaged pupils are 'a high priority'. In many classes they are catching up with their peers, although this is not consistent across the school.

The local authority has provided a great deal of valuable support. This has included strengthening teachers' skills through team teaching, and helpful training for both middle leaders and teachers to update their subject knowledge. There have also been additional visits to support you as the new headteacher, and useful advice from the finance and human resources teams.

The diocese has also supported the school effectively. For example, the diocesan adviser worked alongside subject leaders to develop their confidence to observe teaching and review pupils' learning.

Staff have also benefited from working with local schools to agree teachers' judgements on standards of work, or to see good practice in other settings.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Ofsted Inspector