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Mrs Jude Busari
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Busari

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ashton Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 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 May 2017. 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 for the school to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and four other members of staff, including the leaders for English and mathematics. I met with two members of the governing body and I spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and I met formally with a group of five pupils. I also spoke with pupils as you and I paid a short visit to each class. We also discussed the most recent information relating to the progress pupils make and the new arrangements you have implemented to track their progress more closely. I evaluated the school development plan and together we discussed the English and mathematics action plans. We examined a range of pupils' books from across the school. I checked the school's single central record. Finally, we

discussed the reports written by the local authority following its monitoring visits to the school.

Context

At the time of the last inspection, you had already been appointed as headteacher, with a view to joining the school in September 2017. The headteacher at the time of the last inspection left in August, along with two other teachers. You, and another teacher, took up your posts as planned at the start of this term. Another teacher will be leaving the school at Christmas. You have already appointed a successor, who will start in January 2018. Two governors have joined the governing body. One governor vacancy remains.

Main findings

Although you did not officially begin your post until autumn 2017, you took time to come into school during the summer term to get to know the systems and procedures to help you identify what needed to be done to improve the provision for the pupils. This enabled you to begin your headship from an informed standpoint.

You wrote an action plan to address the issues raised at the previous inspection in May 2017. As you only took up your post in September, the plan was not actioned until this term. This means that some time was lost in the intervening months.

Nevertheless, you wasted no time at the start of term in introducing new initiatives to improve behaviour, increase learning time, raise teachers' expectations of pupils and improve the quality of teaching. You introduced new exercise books for pupils in which to work. You and your staff remind pupils of the importance of presenting their work neatly, giving them strategies to do so. Pupils with whom I spoke said that this is noticeably different from last year. Staff appreciate that, while you have a clear vision for Ashton Church of England Primary School, you take time to listen to their ideas and to involve them in shaping arrangements for school life. An example of this is the new system you have implemented to promote good behaviour. Staff apply the new policy well across the school. Pupils clearly understand and enjoy the system. One pupil told me that the system 'encourages you and makes you want to work harder'. The changes you have made to assemblies have not gone unnoticed by pupils or parents. Opportunities to celebrate achievements are still a key part of this important time, but pupils recognise that they have more time for learning as the approach is more focused.

You have supported the leaders of English and mathematics to write clear action plans to improve the quality of teaching and outcomes in their areas of responsibility. These plans are closely aligned to the school's development plan. Clear milestones enable you and governors to check that developments are on track.

You have been outward looking in your approach to school improvement. You and your staff have benefited from meeting with staff in other schools to discuss ways to improve assessment or classroom environments, for example.

You have welcomed a specialist leader of education and a consultant for English into school to support the leader for English. This is helping her to improve her leadership skills so that she can undertake her responsibilities more effectively. You are supported by a national leader of education, who is the headteacher at a nearby school. This important support has helped you to develop strong systems for tracking pupils' progress and ensuring that assessments of pupils' work are accurate.

You rightly identified that outcomes for pupils at the end of 2017 were too low. You held meetings with teachers earlier this term, sharply focusing on ensuring that their assessments of what pupils know and can do are accurate. You and the teachers have set aspirational targets for pupils' progress, which you plan to review regularly so that additional support can be offered to pupils, should it be required. You and your leaders check regularly on the quality of teaching. You feed back your findings to teachers and check that necessary improvements are made. Pupils' books show that teachers are beginning to improve their practice in line with your feedback.

Pupils' books show that teachers are providing pupils with the opportunity to write at length. In some classes, pupils write for a variety of audiences. For example, older pupils recently learned about the features of an autobiography through writing about sports stars, such as Usain Bolt. The teacher's carefully planned sequence of lessons refined pupils' skills in writing biographies, in preparation for writing about the Paralympian Jonathan Peacock. This task was made very real for the pupils as their completed work was sent to the runner himself. The new approach to teaching writing has been introduced this term. We noticed that this is not fully in place across the school. A consultant for English has provided teachers with valuable training, and more is planned for the coming months. Teachers have also received training to improve their teaching of mathematics.

Pupils' books and our visits to lessons showed that teachers are sometimes using assessments well to plan the next steps in learning so that pupils receive the right level of challenge. This is not consistently the case across the school. Sometimes, teachers have the same expectations of pupils over several weeks.

One of the new governors is a national leader of governance. She has been appointed by the local authority to support the governors to be able to fulfil their roles even more effectively. She is enabling governors to devise systems and structures that will enable them to hold leaders to account effectively and to improve their monitoring of the work of the school.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to the school. It has supported you to monitor the quality of teaching across the school. It has brokered support from a consultant for English, a specialist leader of education and from national leaders of education and of governance who are supporting improvements in leadership. The senior school improvement manager is aware that, as a headteacher with a teaching commitment, you will continue to need additional support to enable you to successfully bring about the necessary improvements over the coming months.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector