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B Basinger-Adams
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Dear Mr Basinger-Adams

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

Following my visit to your school on 14 December 2016, 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 July 2015. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve pupils' achievement in writing across the school and phonics in Year 1
- ensure that the most able pupils are challenged to achieve the progress that they are capable of.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, representatives of the governing body, pupils and the Wiltshire improvement adviser, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Various school development plans and the school's own self-evaluation were evaluated. Some lessons were jointly observed

with senior leaders and pupils' work was evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection you have joined the school as headteacher. You took up post in September 2015. You have also created other senior leadership roles, including the role of deputy headteacher. The school is in the process of joining a multi academy trust. This work should be completed in time for the new 2017/18 academic year.

Main findings

Since your appointment you have taken swift and decisive action to tackle the areas for improvement that emerged from the last inspection. This is because you have an objective and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Your leadership has brought more strategic oversight to bear. The restructuring of the senior leadership team has increased capacity and enabled leaders to manage improvements more effectively.

Furthermore, you have taken action to ensure that the governing body is becoming increasingly effective. At your insistence, governors are now holding you and other leaders to account for school outcomes. Governors now carry out their work with more confidence. This is because they have taken advantage of useful and appropriate training and received effective support from the local authority. It is also because governors responded well to the recommendations that came out of the external review of governance. Governors are providing you with greater challenge over the quality of teaching and achievement of groups of pupils. They use different sources of information and the training that they have received to frame the right questions to hold leaders to account. They are continuing to develop this aspect of their work. Governors are also now more involved in the life of the school than they used to be. For example, they frequently join school leaders to monitor aspects of teaching and learning. They use this information to help them question school leaders effectively about pupils' progress.

The quality of teaching is improving and becoming more consistent across the school as a result of leaders' actions and improving governance. Expectations of staff are high and their performance is managed effectively. The deputy headteacher is playing a key role in ensuring that pupils are clear about what they are learning and why. Staff are also ensuring that pupils experience greater challenge in their learning by selecting tasks of increasing difficulty, according to their ability. These range from 'mild' and 'medium', through to 'spicy' and, for the most able, 'mastery'. However, leaders acknowledge that initiatives such as these must become better established to ensure that pupils, particularly the most able, make the progress of which they are capable.

Pupils are also becoming more self-reliant in their learning because staff are providing them with a range of resources to use should they get stuck. These

include 'toolkits', which contain, for example, materials to assist individual pupils with punctuation, spelling and grammar rules. Bright and stimulating learning displays in classrooms across the school are also promoting key aspects of learning and act as an additional resource. These displays provide pupils with useful guidance to improve reading, writing and mathematics skills. The pupils I spoke to told me that they make full use of these resources because they find them very helpful.

A number of strategies have been put in place to improve mathematics provision. These include important changes to the curriculum, investment in resources, more demanding expectations of pupils and better strategic oversight of the subject. As a result, pupils' achievement in mathematics has risen, as demonstrated in the 2016 key stage 2 outcomes. Pupils are now achieving in line with the national average.

Leaders are aware that writing achievement needs to be higher in all years. This issue has emerged since the last inspection and leaders have been quick to put in place strategies that support the development of pupils' writing skills, although the full effects of the work are as yet to be fully seen. These include actions to improve spelling, such as the weekly homework that has been introduced, and more opportunities to write for different audiences and purposes. Leaders are also taking action to increase phonics achievement in Year 1. They are aware that pupils need to be making the same rapid progress in their reading in Year 1 as they do higher up the school. As yet, however, impact is not fully evident.

Pupils behave well in their lessons and around the school. They follow instructions well, cooperate willingly with each other and enjoy their learning. The pupils I spoke to were confident and self-assured; they willingly shared their largely positive views of the school with me. As one pupil commented, 'I really like school because you learn more about the world.' Another pupil said, 'Teachers make learning as fun as possible.'

External support

You have worked with the Wiltshire improvement adviser since you took up post in September 2015. This is a productive partnership which is helping to secure the necessary school improvement. The improvement adviser knows the school well and is keeping leaders and governors focused on the key issues. He meets with leaders and governors regularly as part of the Wiltshire Improving Schools Programme and provides effective guidance and training. The improvement adviser's interaction with governors is helping them to provide a greater degree of challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector