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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



6 December 2016

Mrs Sue Savage
Associate Headteacher
Blackfordby St Margaret's Church of England (Aided) Primary School
Off Main Street
Blackfordby
Swadlincote
Derbyshire
DE11 8AB

Dear Mrs Savage

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blackfordby St Margaret's Church of England (Aided) Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 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 November 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:

- embed the strategies that have been introduced since September 2016
- further develop the effectiveness of middle leaders in holding others to account
- continue to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers use assessment information to match work more closely to pupils' abilities, particularly for the most able
- continue to improve pupils' progress in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the interim headteacher, other school leaders, a representative of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. With you, I visited every class to observe pupils learning and I also spoke informally to pupils in their lessons. With school leaders, I looked at pupils' work in their books. The school improvement and action plan were also evaluated. I scrutinised other documents, including the monitoring of teachers' performance and minutes of governors' meetings.

Context

The former headteacher left the school towards the end of the summer term in 2016. You were appointed as associate headteacher from September 2016. The chair of the governing body left in the summer of 2016 and was replaced in September 2016. Since the last inspection, one teacher has also left the school and has been replaced by a temporary teacher.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have taken appropriate action to improve the school since the last section 5 inspection, beginning with work undertaken by the deputy headteacher. The pace of these improvements has accelerated considerably since September 2016 following your appointment as associate headteacher and the appointment of a new chair of the governing body.

School leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that need further development. You have written a development plan which addresses these areas and you told me that, as a working document, this will continue to be amended as you evaluate the effectiveness of work that you and your staff are undertaking.

Since the last inspection, you have clarified leadership roles and appointed subject leaders in English and mathematics. Leaders have written action plans to address underperformance in these subject areas. This has meant that there has been greater urgency to address staff and pupils' underperformance. You have introduced more robust systems for monitoring teachers' performance, for example by introducing more regular lesson observations. You are supporting subject leaders to develop their skills in undertaking this activity themselves. You have introduced a new tracking system, which has built on the work already undertaken by the deputy headteacher, to assess pupils' progress. You are supporting staff in using this system to assess more accurately what pupils can do and to plan teaching around what they need to do to improve further. You have ensured that teachers are held more tightly to account through pupil progress meetings. This means that subject

leaders can more accurately monitor pupils' progress and identify gaps in pupils' learning so that these weaknesses can be rectified.

The new chair of the governing body is extremely knowledgeable and has a clear and determined vision of the governing body's role in school improvement. She has ensured that governors understand their responsibilities and is supporting this through giving them access to appropriate training. For example, governors are due to undertake external training in the interpretation of information about pupils' performance. This will build on the training they have already received on the school's system of tracking. It will develop governors' skills in challenging leaders and holding them closer to account. The chair of the governing body is fully aware of the need for further collaboration and support to ensure that all governors are fully equipped to carry out their roles as effectively as possible. You meet the chair of the governing body regularly to discuss the progress that you are making and to plan next actions. This means that governors have an accurate understanding of the school's priorities.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the last inspection. You, and other leaders, have identified areas of weak teaching practice and ensured that these have improved. You are supporting teachers in improving the quality of their lessons through training at staff meetings, coaching and more formal observations. These activities identify weaknesses and enable you to challenge as well as support the teachers. You have advocated an 'assessment for learning' approach which facilitates pupils' reflection on their own learning. In the lessons we visited, we could clearly see that teachers are developing this approach. Pupils were able to identify aspects of their work that they found more difficult. This allows them to focus on the next steps in their learning. You have identified how this can be developed to enable pupils to work out how to improve their work further.

Since the last inspection, there has been an improvement in how well teachers are matching work to pupils' abilities and in many lessons pupils have specific targets on which to focus. However, when we visited lessons some pupils were working on tasks that were too easy for them. You have already identified this as an area in need of further development. Teachers provide clear guidance which is effective because pupils respond to it. In the lessons we visited we noted that teachers are using questioning to better effect, although you have identified that this could be improved further through the use of more extended questioning and by encouraging pupils to be more independent in working out answers for themselves.

The topic-based curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to apply and practise their skills across a wider range of subjects. Pupils' books show good examples of extended writing where they are applying their English skills in other subjects. For example, writing poetry to explore soldiers' feelings during the first world war as part of the Year 6 topic, 'fallen fields'. In the lessons we visited, pupils were enthusiastic about their learning and a clear sense of purpose and engagement was

evident. This was particularly apparent in Year 3 and 4 mathematics lessons where pupils were excited about the activities on offer and proud of their successes.

You have ensured that teachers have developed their understanding of assessment. This means that teachers' assessment of what pupils can do is more accurate than it has been in the past. Your current tracking of pupils' progress indicates improved results for Year 6 pupils next summer.

Your drive and vision for school improvement is clear. You are very ably supported by your deputy headteacher and chair of the governing body. Between you, you have enabled significant progress against the previously agreed areas for improvement and have clear plans in place to improve further. You and I have agreed that we will continue informal, remote monitoring.

External support

You have been well supported by the local authority and have also been proactive in seeking external support. You have made good use of your links with Albert Village Primary School and teachers have visited that school for support. For example, teachers have observed mathematics lessons there which have helped them to understand how to plan and teach this subject more effectively. These visits have also provided the opportunity for teachers to collaborate with teachers of pupils of the same ages as those for whom they are responsible. In the summer term of 2016, leaders benefited from working with the Syston and Thurmaston Educational Partnership to develop the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and to strengthen leadership. The diocese board of education senior governance adviser has also provided support to the governing body, particularly in the transition of the new chair of the governing body; this work was beneficial in exploring the potential of the governing body and its restructure.

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

Yours sincerely

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector