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3 April 2013

Tina Bunting
Headteacher
Abbotswood Junior School
Ringwood Road
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Hampshire
SO40 8EB

Dear Mrs Bunting

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Abbotswood Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, two year leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school's improvement plans were evaluated together with a sample of reviews of pupils' progress, and leaders' reports on their observation of lessons.

Context

The headteacher retires at the end of the summer term. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up post from September 2013.

Main findings

Senior leaders have, rightly, focused on improving teaching and a coaching programme has been introduced to improve the quality of teaching in cases where this is weaker. The senior leaders' checks on the quality of teaching, since the inspection, point to some improvements in teaching for the teachers who have been supported. This indicates the coaching is having some impact. However, leaders' reports do not routinely evaluate the quality of learning of different groups of pupils and some comments are too general. Reports that are specific about the lessons' stronger and weaker points are more helpful because they give the teachers pointers for improvement, to strengthen pupils' learning. The less experienced year leaders are being coached by a deputy headteacher. They are clear of their roles in checking pupils' progress. Some year leaders' reviews record, specifically, what teachers are going to do to help the pupils who need to make good progress quickly; others are not as detailed and helpful.

The governing body has responded positively to the inspection and arranged an audit of their minutes and paperwork, by the local authority. The Chair of Governors is keen to listen to, and act on, advice to strengthen the governing body's influence and impact. A good start has been made in drawing up an action plan for governance. This includes appropriate actions but is not explicit enough about the information governors need on the quality of teaching and the progress of different groups of pupils, such as those who benefit from additional government funding.

The school's plans include the main areas for improvement from the inspection report but some of the detail that underpins each area is not as precise as it needs to be. The plan is insufficiently clear about how leaders will raise teachers' expectations for the more-able pupils; how teachers' plans will be matched more successfully to the different ability groups; and how teachers' questioning skills will be broadened. Importantly, the plan does not stipulate how senior leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness will become more accurate. The plan includes some measurable criteria so that the leaders and governors can check, at given points, whether the actions are proving successful. The arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the plans are not entirely clear, in terms of who will do this and when. Governors' role in checking the plan is being implemented successfully is not explicit. These weaker aspects of the improvement plans undermine the senior leaders' intentions and aspirations for the school to be judged good at its next inspection.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- make sure all the statements from the inspection report, in the section 'what does the school need to do to improve further?' are included in the school's improvement plan
- include clear information on how and when the actions will be monitored and evaluated, and who will do this
- be clearer about the information governors require on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress, and the role of governors in monitoring and evaluating the school's progress.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Since the inspection, the degree of support from the local authority has picked up. The primary phase inspector and Local Leader in Education is providing a programme of support for senior leaders. This has included moderating the headteacher's judgements on the quality of teaching, through joint lesson observations. Support for English and mathematics leaders has also been agreed. The programme of support is appropriately focused on aspects the school needs to improve. Governors have benefited from advice on drawing up an action plan and, particularly, recruiting a new headteacher for the school. This process has helped to sharpen key governors' awareness of the school's effectiveness. The interview procedure, for example, has helped governors to ask searching questions of candidates, which has focused governors' attention on the type of questions needed to challenge the school's leaders and help the school move to good.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector