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24 May 2013

Mr Chris Murphy
Headteacher
Maidenbower Junior School
Harvest Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH10 7RA

Dear Mr Murphy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Maidenbower Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a member of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plans and other documentation were scrutinised and evaluated. You accompanied me on a tour of the school and took me into several lessons during which time I was able to speak to pupils and look at their work.

Context

Since the previous inspection you have announced your retirement, with effect from September 2013. Governors have recently appointed a new headteacher who will take up post in September 2013.

Main findings

The outcome of the inspection that took place in February was a disappointment to you and your governors with some judgements not fully accepted by all. Nevertheless, you have put together an action plan to address the points for improvement identified within the inspection and some aspects are beginning to yield success.

Governors and leaders have held open meetings with parents since the inspection to gauge their views and ask them what they would like to see improve. Parents have asked for explanations of pupils' attainment on entry to the school and why on occasion, leaders disagree with assessments from the previous school. They have also asked for details of their children's targets and progress towards them, expressed in levels. You have responded positively to these requests and this information is now being provided. A new planner for each pupil has been ordered for September so that this information can be provided to parents in a uniform manner.

Weak teaching is being addressed; teachers are either being supported to improve or have left. You and your senior leaders have identified a training need for your teachers concerning their confidence and capability to use assessment information successfully to plan more challenging lessons for all pupils. The local authority has also picked this up and is providing initial training for your team on the use of data which you will need to take further with the rest of your staff. The local authority has also offered to provide joint observations but so far, you have not responded to this offer.

Your school improvement plan correctly addresses the issues arising from the previous inspection. However, some aspects are too vague or given insufficient weight. There is no specific reference to mathematics and the priority relating to feedback to pupils needs to attach equal importance to written as well as verbal feedback, the former being the point raised in the report. The plan also lacks any specific measures of success. In its present form it is difficult to see how governors or parents would assess if progress is being made.

Governors acknowledge that the school needs to improve swiftly. Within the context of the headship appointment process, the successful candidate was asked to provide new ways forward in relation to the issues for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen aspects of the plan that we discussed so that governors and parents are able to identify what subjects and what aspects of feedback to pupils require improvement with clearly identified measures of success
- ensure that a focus on pupils' learning and progress from their starting points is central to all future evaluation of both teaching and achievement; if through externally moderated re-assessment on entry, new targets for certain pupils are set, these need to be challenging and routinely monitored so as to evidence good or outstanding progress by then end of Key Stage 2
- ensure that all staff are trained in effective use of data to inform their lesson plans
- ensure that the local authority offer of joint observation is taken up.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided good support. Officers have correctly raised concerns in relation to leaders' and teachers' understanding and use of assessment information to plan for improvement. There are plans for further input in this area and support for the new headteacher when she takes up post in September.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex and as below.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Diocese -voluntary controlled schools