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Ms Caroline Potter
Headteacher
Moorlands Primary School
Kesteven Way
Bitterne
Southampton
SO18 5RJ

Dear Ms Potter

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Moorlands Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, governors and a local authority representative. I visited each classroom with you to observe part of a lesson, and evaluated the school improvement plan and a sample of pupils' work.

Context

Since the last inspection one member of staff has gone on long term leave of absence; a vacancy which is being covered by other teachers. New joint-Chairs of the Governing Body have been elected. Building work is continuing to enlarge the school to two classes per year group.

Main findings

You have sustained the confidence of staff and governors in your work to improve the school, and you have an accurate awareness of the considerable task to secure good achievement for all pupils.

The school improvement plan focuses on the right overall areas, with teaching a high priority. Sequences of actions to bring about change are logical but it is not always clear enough how the impact will be checked, or by whom. You have rightly prioritised accelerating the progress of Year 6 pupils, who have the greatest legacy of underachievement and need to prepare for secondary school. Pupil progress targets have been set but these are not challenging enough to address the low attainment in many year groups. Progress needs to be faster in order for pupils to catch up with where they should be. Targets also lack precision for groups, such as pupils in receipt of free school meals or with special educational needs. This makes it difficult for you and the staff to know what is expected of these pupils, and to check whether the support you provide is successful.

You are rightly involving other leaders more in monitoring pupils' progress and improving teaching. The deputy headteacher and subject leaders know they need to make greater impact on pupils' attainment. They are getting the right opportunities to observe lessons and provide feedback and coaching for staff. You have usefully refined lesson feedback to reflect on the previous targets set for each teacher. Staff are more active in following up on advice and are positive about the changes, with many keeping a useful log of their developments. Your expected features of teaching, such as regular reference to pupils' targets, are becoming more evident. However, leaders' lesson observations focus on too many aspects of teaching to rapidly improve key areas such as ensuring pupils know how to improve their work. In this respect, pupils were unanimous in saying lessons have clearer 'success criteria', or 'steps for success', but too many interpret these as things to be done rather than how to achieve work of a high standard. This makes it difficult for them to move forward independently. I must stress there is good practice in the school. As you know, we saw some very effective learning where pupils' clarity over this issue meant they were fully engaged and learning fast. Your work with staff needs to ensure this is true in all lessons and that teachers know what good learning 'looks like'. Teachers' marking is more regular but is not referred to enough by pupils, and some target stickers in books are not written in language which pupils understand.

The governors are working closely with you on monitoring the school's progress on the key area of teaching. The formation of a 'task group', including external partners such as the local authority, is giving governors better knowledge of the work going on to improve the school. They are building their skills through training, for example to improve their understanding of data about pupils' progress. Their visits are focused more effectively on specific areas of the school's work. They are aware of

the overall targets which you hope pupils will achieve, but as noted above, the lack of specific targets for groups such as pupils on free school meals, hinders their capacity to hold the school to account.

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

- sharpen the action plan so it:
 - is always clear how the impact of actions will be checked
 - includes challenging and specific targets for year groups and different groups of pupils so lessons are planned which help them catch up with or exceed age-related expectations
- ensure the monitoring of teaching focuses on a few key areas so the impact of work to improve practice is not dissipated.

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

You are making effective use of local authority personnel to monitor the school's progress, as well as to provide consultancy in areas such as mathematics, governor training and training for yourself and other leaders. I am pleased you are working with schools in the teaching school alliance and local 'cluster'. Staff visits to observe teaching and talk to colleagues in similar roles in those schools are proving helpful, and I urge you to continue with this.

I am copying this letter to the joint-Chairs of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Southampton.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector