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Mrs Talbot-Jones
St Denys Primary School
Dundee Road
Southampton
Hampshire
SO17 2ND

Dear Mrs Talbot-Jones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Denys Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, three middle leaders, five members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and reviewed other documents, including information about your pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. I talked to eight pupils from Year 5 about their work in lessons and looked at their books. I also accompanied you on a walk around the school, briefly visiting seven classrooms.

Context

The deputy headteacher is leaving at the end of the academic year. From September, additional senior leadership support will be provided by the local teaching alliance for two days each week.

Main findings

You and the governing body have set about tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection with energy and clarity of vision. The school's action plan incorporates clearly the key areas for improvement. The activities that have been identified are sensible and focused. Many are underway. Helpfully, the plan identifies timings, measurable impact criteria and a suitable range of monitoring activities. However, you need to include clear baseline measures so that it is easier to evaluate the progress that you have made in addressing the priorities for improvement.

The governing body is monitoring the impact of the school's actions. Its members have close links with staff who lead particular subjects or aspects of the school's work. This is developing well. However, currently, governors do not visit classrooms routinely to check at first hand the progress made by pupils or the consistency of teaching across different year groups.

High expectations about what can be achieved are now the norm. Staff have a better understanding of what constitutes good practice and what is not good enough. A programme of training and development opportunities is in place for all staff that focuses on the key areas for improvement. This is leading to more consistent approaches to teaching and leadership.

The marking policy has been revised. There are now planned opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' comments through frequent 'read and respond' sessions at the start of lessons. Pupils told me that the consistently applied marking symbols used by teachers are helpful and clear. They also appreciate the opportunities they have to respond to teachers' comments and feel that this helps them to improve their work. Whilst the criteria that teachers use to describe the skills or knowledge pupils need to learn are clear and relevant they are sometimes too generic. Currently they do not allow pupils of different abilities to evaluate how well they have achieved their personal targets.

Your middle leaders are excited about the opportunities that they have had to develop their leadership skills. They have benefited from visits to other successful schools and from the support they have received from experienced leaders. They now have designated time in which to carry out their monitoring activities and regular opportunities to meet with you and each other to discuss the school's priorities. This has strengthened their understanding of the quality of provision across different year groups and has enabled them to support other teachers. They are beginning to evaluate the impact of their work. Currently, they have only limited opportunities to hold other teachers to account for the progress of their pupils.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, careful planning of teacher led activities has led to greater active engagement from the children. There are now even closer links between Reception and Key Stage 1, with regular sharing of good practice. This is having a positive impact on the rate of progress made by children.

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:

- provide on-going support for the governing body so that it continues to develop a range of monitoring activities, particularly in relation to visits to classrooms
- give middle leaders structured opportunities to take on and then lead activities that hold other staff to account for the progress that pupils make
- refine the criteria for successful learning so that they provide pupils of different abilities with clearer guidance about what they need to demonstrate if they are to achieve their ambitious targets.

I will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection. I recommend that a further monitoring inspection is carried out during the next academic year to review the school's progress in raising achievement and improving the quality and consistency of teaching.

External support

The local authority has provided a range of well-targeted support. It has helped the school to prepare an effective action plan and has worked with the governing body to develop its monitoring activities. You also have a strong partnership with the local teaching alliance of schools. This has provided opportunities for staff to see good practice and improve their leadership skills. The proposal to provide senior leadership support during the autumn term for two days a week is welcome but insufficient if the school is to continue to improve at a rapid rate.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector