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17 July 2013

Mrs L Howlett
Headteacher
Nunney First School
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Frome
Somerset
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Dear Mrs Howlett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Nunney First School

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 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 met with you, members of the governing body and the school improvement partner that is supporting the school, on behalf of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. The school's action plan was evaluated and I looked at records of the checks you are making on the quality of teaching. We briefly visited each classroom together and I examined pupils' written work.

Context

Since the last full inspection, one teacher has been absent long-term through ill health and you have taken responsibility for leading mathematics and assessment. One teacher has been teaching in Year 2 on a fixed-term contract. Two governors have left the governing body and been replaced.

Main findings

You now track pupils' attainment and the progress they make more carefully. While staff and the governing body are becoming more aware of the attainment of different groups of pupils and the progress they make, the lack of a single tracking system prevents you from having easy access to important information. With the support of the school improvement partner, you have checked how well letters and sounds, (called phonics) are taught. You have rightly identified that improvement is required and have promptly planned training for next term.

Training provided by a literacy consultant has clarified the school's expectations for teaching writing. Pupils' written work shows that pupils are responding positively to the interesting opportunities they are now given to write longer pieces of work. Marking is becoming more consistent and older pupils are beginning to check their own work and that of others. While pupils in Year 3 have begun to regain ground as result of the programmes of individual support, no pupils attained the higher level in writing at the end of Year 2 for the second year running. Teachers do not check pupils' attainment in writing frequently enough and teachers' assessments of pupils' work are not yet secure. I recommended that the school use Ofsted's English survey report and training materials to improve the teaching of writing.

The school's action plan focuses well on what needs to happen for further improvement. In particular, you have set measurable targets to raise attainment in each year group in writing. Success criteria for this key issue are helpfully colour coded so that leaders can see at a glance whether the rate of progress is fast enough. Similar targets to improve reading and mathematics with interim milestones should now be included. The governing body has been involved in drawing up and revising the plan. Governors are now able to follow the progress that the school is making as a result of being linked to each key issue in the plan.

Governors now have a better understanding of how the school's performance compares with the other schools as a result of training provided by the local authority. Several governors oversee specific aspects of the school's provision such as the support provided for pupils with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium. Meetings have been reorganised to focus more attention on what is happening in lessons and this is strengthening the governing body's position to make strategic decisions. The governing body has commissioned an audit of its effectiveness from the local authority. I recommended that the outcomes should be incorporated into the school's action plan so that the governing body can secure further improvements routinely.

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:

- establish a single system for staff and the governing body to track pupils' attainment and the progress they make
- train all staff to teach phonics and extend the teaching of phonics into Key Stage 2
- use the findings of Ofsted's Moving English Forward report and training materials to improve the teaching of writing
- check pupils' achievement in writing more frequently and moderate teachers' assessments for accuracy
- undertake the planned review of governance and incorporate the outcomes in to the school's action plan.

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 now have a clear understanding of the next steps to take to improve teaching as a result of the effective support provided by the school improvement partner on behalf of the local authority. Working with a larger group of local schools has given you a better understanding of what is required for Year 4 pupils to achieve different national curriculum levels in writing. I recommended that you adopt a similar approach to improve the way that teachers assess pupils' work in other year groups.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector