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Lynne Birch
Headteacher
Templefield Lower School
Malham Close
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Bedford
MK45 1AJ

Dear Mrs Birch

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Templefield Lower School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 held meetings with you and other members of the leadership team, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records and the most recent information on pupil achievement, and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school's context since the section 5 inspection. Two teachers are leaving the school at the end of term and replacements have been appointed. An external review of governance starts shortly.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written an action plan and summary that are aligned to the issues identified in your previous inspection
- reviewed the teaching of literacy and provided staff with additional guidance in the teaching of sounds that letters make (phonics), reading and writing
- developed with staff and governors a new marking and feedback policy
- increased the frequency and rigour of monitoring activities.

Your action plan clearly indicates how you will improve the quality of teaching, leadership and governance, in order to make pupils' progress more consistently good. You have started to evaluate progress in implementing the plan; the addition of an action plan summary, which includes targets at three points during the next year, is helping to keep improvements on track. However, the plan does not indicate starting points for different groups of pupils in order to help measure the gains pupils make. There is also little information about how you will use the school's strengths to tackle weaknesses, for example how you will use pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development or work in other subjects to stimulate better writing, reading and mathematics.

Your feedback following lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work is helping to improve teaching, particularly where the focus is precise. For example, your specific feedback on phonics is contributing to better teaching and achievement, evident in our visits to classes and in pupils' improved performance when tested. The additional phonics training planned for next term is a well-timed opportunity for staff to refine their teaching further. Your resource to help parents and carers support phonics teaching shows that you are developing helpful approaches, following visits to other schools. Although it is good that more staff are now monitoring the quality and impact of teaching the usefulness of written evaluations varies widely. Not all staff observing lessons give enough written guidance about what could have been improved. This limits the sharpness of subsequent observations and analyses.

The revised marking and feedback policy makes expectations of staff clear. However, although this is stronger in the action plan the policy does not emphasise clearly enough what you expect pupils to do in response to feedback and marking. Similarly, the expectations of pupils in relation to improving the quality of learning are not clear enough. For example, how well pupils are taught to find out, record, review or modify their work for themselves. You should also give further attention to developing teacher's self-evaluation to promote more consistently good teaching.

You have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following my visit to the school, I recommend that further actions are taken to:

- make clearer pupils' starting points so that staff and governors are able to measure more easily the progress made by different groups of pupils
- show how the school will use its strengths to tackle weaker areas of provision, including features that are stronger in schools visited such as the learning environment in the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 4
- add more detail to the action plan about pupils' expected contribution to learning, and use this to help evaluate the impact of teaching
- use more focused lesson observations, learning walks and work scrutiny to build on the model used to evaluate phonics teaching
- develop teacher's self-evaluation, linked to their visits to other schools.

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

External support

The local authority has responded to your inspection by making a statement of action which includes a commitment to a six day programme of support by a specialist in school improvement. The programme includes a suitable range of activities including joint lesson observations, data analysis and support for senior, middle/subject leaders and governors. In addition, the local authority is providing external training that is focused on weaker aspects of the school's provision. An external review of governance, followed by governor training, starts on 22 July. The school is making effective use of links with outstanding schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector