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10 September 2013

Mrs Karen Joyce
Headteacher
Somerlea Park Junior School
Bank Street
Somercotes
Alfreton
Derbyshire
DE55 4JE

Dear Mrs Joyce

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Somerlea Park Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 10 September, 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 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.

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

- refine your evaluation of the quality of teaching, taking into account evidence drawn from visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work, and your assessments on pupils' progress in order to make more precise recommendations to individual teachers on how to improve their skills in teaching a range of subjects
- adapt the school development plan so that criteria for success are specific and linked to the progress and attainment of pupils
- accelerate the progress of pupils in Year 4 and Year 6 so that they attain standards which are at least average by the time they leave the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the acting deputy headteacher, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body. We conducted a tour of the school with the deputy headteacher. I considered your monitoring of teaching and learning as well as data relating to the progress and attainment of pupils. I looked at examples of pupils' work and considered the quality of marking. I evaluated your school improvement plan.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the governing body has appointed two new teachers who took up their posts in September 2013.

Main findings

Staff have responded positively to training and support, including working with colleagues in a school led by a Local Leader of Education. As a result, teachers are now planning more carefully what they want pupils to learn. They have adapted termly and weekly plans so that the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics is more systematic, building upon pupils' existing knowledge and skills. Teachers are ensuring that pupils understand what they are intended to learn over the course of a lesson and are designing activities which are more closely matched to the needs of pupils of different abilities. They are giving pupils time to respond to the developmental marking. Consequently, pupils are learning more quickly. Nevertheless, governors and senior leaders are acutely aware of the need to accelerate the progress of pupils in Year 4 and Year 6 so that they can attain at least average standards by the time they leave the school.

Teachers are using questioning skills more effectively to check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching accordingly. They are asking more open-ended questions which challenge pupils to use a wider range of thinking skills. Consequently, pupils are more engaged in their learning and are developing their skills in reasoning.

You have implemented a new approach to the teaching of handwriting. Pupils are being provided with more opportunities to improve their skills in handwriting and they are proud of their new 'handwriting contracts'. As a result, pupils are using their best handwriting when they produce written work in a range of subjects.

You have worked with your leadership team to undertake frequent checks on the quality of teaching. However, you are not using this evidence well enough to target precise support to enable individual teachers to improve their practice in a wide range of subjects as quickly as they could.

The governing body is working effectively with senior leaders to set the strategic direction of the school. Plans are sharply focused upon addressing the issues identified for improvement at the section 5 inspection. They are detailed and set out clearly the actions which are to be undertaken in order to raise pupils' achievements.

However, there are insufficient milestones within the plan to enable governors to check on a regular basis, whether actions are having the desired impact.

The governing body has arranged for an external review of governance to be undertaken this half term.

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 been swift to provide a comprehensive programme of additional support to the school through the deployment of the local authority advisor, a Local Leader of Education from Duckmanton Primary School, and teaching and learning consultants. As a result of this support, teachers have developed their skills in providing more precise feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. Teaching and learning consultants have supported senior leaders in ensuring that the assessment of pupils' achievements is accurate. This is helping teachers to plan work which more closely meets the needs of pupils of different abilities.

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

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty's Inspector