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Ms Lesley Cook, Headteacher
Fakenham Junior School
Queen's Road
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Norfolk
NR21 8BN

Dear Ms Cook

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fakenham Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 26 September 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are beginning to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. However, some of the plans are at an early stage of being implemented. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the action plan by adding more detail about the expected impact of better teaching on pupils' progress and attainment
- set higher expectations of how pupils present their work, particularly handwriting, as one of your 'non-negotiable' features of teaching
- involve all subject leaders in improving the quality of topic work
- give pupils, parents and carers more information about the school's plans and how they can help to speed up improvements
- use links with good or better schools to gather examples of the higher expectations you are setting for staff and pupils, for example marking.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the literacy and numeracy leaders, the school council, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records, scrutinised a sample of pupils' topic books, and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, the deputy headteacher has returned following a secondment to a school causing concern. A new teacher has joined Year 6.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written an action plan that is aligned to the key issues for improvement
- revised, and shared with staff, your 'non-negotiable' features of teaching
- increased the range, frequency and rigour of monitoring activities
- organised Year 6 into smaller groups for English and mathematics lessons
- involved staff in moderating the standards of work attained by pupils
- raised the profile of topic books and writing linked to topics
- planned a 'mathematics week' to promote pupils' independence and problem-solving.

Your actions to tackle the areas requiring improving are starting to take effect. Staff are giving pupils more written feedback about how they can improve their work and pupils' responses are being checked. However, the quality of marking is not yet consistently good. Some marking still focuses on praise and attitudes to work. Staff are not supporting their comments about what needs improving by examples, to help pupils understand what is expected. Untidy presentation, particularly handwriting, is not challenged enough. Consequently, pupils respond to marking, but do not always raise the level of their work significantly.

Your feedback following learning walks, lesson observations and scrutiny of work is helping to improve teaching. This is because senior leaders and governors are now using the Teachers' Standards more rigorously to make sure that different features of teaching are equally good. For example, during our visits to classes some teachers asked good questions to assess pupils' understanding and shape the lesson accordingly. Not all teachers do; the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. The 'non-negotiable' guidance you have given teachers whilst helpful, could be simplified to aid planning and evaluating lessons. Governors have also challenged you to say more about your expectations of homework. Your written feedback to teachers should be clearer about the extent to which expectations have been met. You should also encourage staff to reflect on their work, in order to sustain their improvements.

Pupils are now doing more writing in their topic books, linked to other subjects. They are enjoying the topics studied. However, topic work has not yet benefitted from visits, visitors or other first-hand experiences to inspire pupils' writing. Your action plan does not show how leaders of different subjects will help to improve the quality of topic work. Your English and mathematics subject leaders are in a good position to share their practice, for example in developing separate subject action plans that complement the schools'.

Your 2012 and 2013 test results showed that by Year 6 pupils had not reached the standards associated with good schools, particularly girls. Your monitoring of pupils' progress indicates recent improvement. To make sure that good progress is sustained your action plan should give more detail about starting points for different groups of pupils and the gains expected, as a result of better teaching. This should also help governors check the progress being made.

You have already devised some good ideas to engage parents and carers, for example the 'curiosity café' to make learning about their child's work informative and enjoyable. This is a good initiative to build on. However, you have not yet shared the school's plans following the inspection with parents and carers, or pupils. The proportion of parents and carers using Parent View to record their views is low. The Governing Body is keen to support the school in engaging parents and carers and in securing a 'good' judgement at the next inspection. Governors are using examples of good practice featured on Ofsted's website, to challenge the school. You have started to make good work produced in school a more prominent feature of displays and newsletters. Partnerships with exemplary schools are at an early stage.

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 school uses the support of an independent adviser but has chosen not to buy into the 'Norfolk to Good and Great' scheme. Seven teachers are enrolled on professional development courses that include programmes provided by the Sheringham Teaching School.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector