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Mr Paul Moon
Millfield School
Coleshill Street
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Dear Mr Moon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Millfield School

Following my visit to your school on 10 October 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- add indicators to the school's improvement plan that can be used to regularly check the progress pupils are making and ensure these are aligned with those contained in performance management targets, including for the headteacher
- avoid unnecessary repetition by using the subjects of the curriculum more to consolidate the skills that are introduced in mathematics and English.
- increase the pace of learning in lessons by ensuring all pupils can move more quickly onto work that is challenging.
- increase the amount of interventions for pupils falling behind in their learning, particularly for those eligible for the pupil premium.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your deputy head teacher and two members of the Governing Body, including the Chair. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised a range of documents, including minutes of the governing body meetings, information about the progress pupils are making and the school's evaluations of teaching. I also made short visits to 13 lessons.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the school was inspected in June 2013.

Main findings

Your provisional results for the 2013 National test and assessments point to some improvement this year, particularly by the end of Key Stage 1. Lesson observations and the school's assessment information confirm that pupils are not yet making good progress throughout the school although there are signs of improvement, especially from Reception through to Year 4.

You have recognised that in the past new initiatives have not always had enough impact because staff have not always had the sustained support that enables them to implement new ideas well. This situation is changing; for instance, since the inspection a much more effective approach is being adopted to ensure targets are used more effectively in lessons. As a result, pupils are much more aware of what they must do to improve, particularly in Key Stage 1. This improvement is because teachers regularly and actively involve pupils in reviewing their targets using attractive displays in the classroom. In addition, marking is improving because next steps are identified and pupils are given more opportunity to respond to teachers' comments.

Teachers are assiduous in ensuring pupils undertake different tasks in an attempt to ensure these are matched to their needs. In a highly effective lesson observed during the visit, a Year 2 teacher adjusted the lesson so middle ability pupils could undertake the more demanding work on adverbs that was originally planned only for the most able. However at times there is a lack of flexibility, primarily because pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to make choices and concentrate on work that is challenging. Higher in the school there is some unnecessary repetition, particularly in mathematics lessons. More reliance could be placed on the subjects of the curriculum as a way of reinforcing the skills introduced in mathematics and English; for instance, using science to reinforce data handling skills or history to assist pupils in their understanding of difference between fact and opinion.

There have been noteworthy improvements in leadership and management. The half termly progress meetings have been made more rigorous; for instance teachers have to take greater responsibility for analysing the key assessment information. There are promising signs that the school is developing a more realistic self-evaluation. During the visit, you and your deputy demonstrated accurate and perceptive views about the quality of teaching. You have also correctly recognised that partnerships with other schools can help the school to develop more effective interventions that can reduce the gaps in performance that exist, particularly for pupils eligible for pupil premium. Your Governing Body has created a new committee to specifically consider pupil progress. The more recent Governing Body minutes suggest governors are beginning to adopt a more challenging role.

Your school has challenging targets but your plans do not yet contain quantifiable targets that can be used to check regularly the impact of the changes on pupils' progress. Governors have correctly recognised the importance of ensuring future performance management targets are strongly linked to the challenging targets the school has for improving pupil progress.

External support

The local authority has a good awareness of the strengths that exist in leadership in the school. The local authority has assisted in the arrangements for an external review of governance and is helping to organise partnership working with other schools. A local authority review of teaching is planned to check that staff can confidently demonstrate the new skills they are developing.

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

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector