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Elaine Glendinning
Headteacher
Southtown Infant School
Tamworth Lane
Southtown
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Dear Mrs Glendinning

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southtown Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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:

- Ensure that governors recruit at least one further governor with expertise in school improvement and the evaluation of school performance data.
- Devise new documentation to help ensure that governors' monitor progress towards the targets set in the school improvement plan, and that they increase the level of challenge to ensure that this progress remains on track.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your deputy, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated together with other monitoring and evaluation documents. Particular attention was paid to the school's curriculum and the school's assessment of pupils' progress. A total of seven classes were visited jointly with the deputy headteacher in order to evaluate learning.

Main findings

Since the last inspection the results of national tests for 2013 have become available. These show that the early indications of improvement shown in the results of 2012 have continued and accelerated since then.

From low levels of prior attainment on entry, pupils now leave the school at the end of Year 2 having reached standards that are close to national average. The proportion of those exceeding these expectations improved markedly in 2013. This means that pupils progress faster than expected, and this accelerates quickly in Year 2. This acceleration is fastest in mathematics and reading. However gaps remain between the standards reached by boys and girls, especially in writing. In mathematics the gap has closed. The difference between the progress made by those pupils for whom the school receives additional funding through the pupil premium and their peers is small.

Notably, the significant proportion of pupils with special educational needs make progress that is faster than their peers, and reach standards that are higher than the national average for these pupils. This is because their needs are evaluated early and effective support provided promptly. This strong performance has been consistent for a number of years.

The school has introduced structured commercially-available learning schemes for literacy and mathematics. Teachers carefully assess the learning taking place. This assessment is accurate and so they have good indications of how well pupils are doing. Because of this, teachers are often able to allow pupils to progress through the curriculum quickly, making rapid progress. Others are able to catch up if they find topics difficult and spend longer on them. In addition, extra support and guided learning in literacy and numeracy is plentiful. Teaching assistants skilfully identify the

areas that pupils need to work on, challenging or supporting them where appropriate.

In class, pupils quickly acquire the skills necessary to learn effectively. They work well independently or with their peers and are not afraid to ask questions or volunteer an answer. They make good contributions, and disruption due to poor behaviour is hardly seen. Those pupils who talked to me were inquisitive and polite.

You and your deputy have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is reflected in the excellent post-inspection action plan. This clearly evaluates what needs to be done, who will do it and by when. Targets are clear and challenging. However this level of detail is not reflected in the level of challenge provided to the school by governors. They are supportive but rely too much on what they are told by the headteacher rather than challenging and setting targets for improvement that they can monitor. This is partly because the documentation used to record governors meetings does not allow for actions and responsibilities to be noted, so monitoring of progress at subsequent meetings is difficult.

The school has placed considerable emphasis on the training of teachers and the evaluation of learning. Specialist training on the implementation of the new curriculum has been undertaken by all staff. In addition, the school's own methods of lesson evaluation have been changed so that the emphasis is more on pupils' learning rather than teaching. This means that the school is good at pitching lessons at the right level to challenge all.

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 has accessed external support from other schools, especially concerning the implementation of the new curriculum.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector