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24 October 2013

Mrs P Winsor
Executive Headteacher
Parsons Down Junior School
Hérons Way
Thatcham
RG19 3SR

Dear Mrs Winsor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parsons Down Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 May 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:

- review the electronic system for tracking pupils' progress
- include short-term targets for pupils' progress in the school development plan
- adjust the points at which information on pupils' progress is gathered throughout the academic year so that the governing body can better judge the progress the school is making towards its targets
- increase the involvement of the governing body in monitoring the work of the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the head of school and the assistant headteacher to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and a group of pupils. I spoke to a representative of the local authority by telephone. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Changes have been made to the leadership structure of the school. A new head of school and two 'standards leaders' have been appointed. The 'standards leaders' each have responsibility for the learning and progress of two year groups in the school.

Main findings

The changes in the leadership structure have strengthened the school's capacity to improve. Management responsibilities are now shared more widely and all leaders understand their role and their accountability. Senior staff have drawn up a comprehensive action plan that is based on rigorous and self-critical evaluation of the school's current position. The plan has appropriate long-term targets for pupils' attainment and progress across both schools in the federation. Currently, there are no short-term targets in the plan and so it is not clear what progress the governing body can expect to see at various points during the year.

Senior leaders have a clear strategy to improve the quality of teaching and are determined to do this quickly. They have increased the rigour of the checks made on the quality of teaching and make sure that teachers receive very clear feedback about any aspects of their work that need to be improved. All staff understand the link between the quality of teaching and pupils' progress over time.

Procedures to check the progress of pupils have been tightened. The new 'standards leaders' work closely with teachers and check that staff make the best use of information about pupils' progress to plan work that meets the needs of different ability groups. Information on pupils' progress is gathered regularly, but governors do not receive reports frequently enough to enable them to judge whether the changes that have been made are having an impact on standards.

Pupils are very positive about the changes that have been introduced since September. They particularly like the new 'good to be green' behaviour policy and the school's system of rewards for good work and good conduct.

The review of governance that was recommended at the time of the section 5 inspection is due to take place next month. It is envisaged that there will be a

greater role for the governing body in monitoring the work of the school once the review is completed.

HMI will contact the school at the start of the summer term to review progress. 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 is monitoring the school's progress closely. Since the recent section 5 inspection, the school has joined the 'improving schools programme' run by the local authority. This provides enhanced support to the school from advisers and consultants. School leaders have already made good use of the various training courses on offer for teachers and middle leaders.

The relationship with the partner school in the federation is developing well and teachers now benefit from regular opportunities to work closely with colleagues and share good practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles
Her Majesty's Inspector