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Alex Evans
Pixmore Junior School
Rushby Mead
SG6 1RS

Dear Mrs Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pixmore Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 21 November 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 September 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:

- improve the quality of teaching in Years 4 and 5, by ensuring that the work and tasks match the needs of individual pupils throughout lessons
- refine assessments so that teachers and senior leaders can track pupils' progress more precisely

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, four members of the Governing Body and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school action plan, minutes of governing body meetings, reviews by the local leader of education, and the school's monitoring and assessment documentation. You accompanied me during visits to all classes in the school, where we observed teaching, spoke with pupils and looked at their work.

Main findings

You are starting to tackle the issues highlighted in the recent inspection. Teaching in Years 3 and 6 is improving. Pupils receive better feedback about their work and they know what they need to do in order to improve. The picture is very different in Year 4 and year 5. All pupils routinely do the same work in literacy. This means that, for example, a pupil working at Level 2 does exactly the same work as one working at Level 5. You have focused staff development and training in this area through staff meetings and the monitoring of pupils' work. Despite this, the quality of teaching in these year groups remains a concern. Pupils listen to teachers for too long in these classes and the work set for them is either too easy or it is too difficult. Teachers' planning does not provide enough direction for teaching assistants during lessons. The classrooms are poorly organised and the available space is not well used. This combination of poor practice is restricting progress and is need of your urgent attention.

Your current assessment processes are not refined enough to enable teachers to make regular and meaningful checks. The resulting data that your system produces is of limited value to class teachers and senior leaders. A more sensitive assessment model is required so that you can identify a pupil in danger of under-achieving very quickly.

Your evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate. You have written an action plan that focuses on the right areas but it lacks clearly defined and measurable success criteria. This means that it will be difficult for you and governors to know exactly when you achieve your goals. Your leadership team is small and has little leadership time to support you as you monitor and evaluate the work of the school. As such, you need to prioritise your own time more effectively to ensure that teaching is improving quickly. You have responded well to your partnership with a local leader of education and this has already provided you with a concise set of tasks. These should become the focus of your work in the coming weeks.

Governors are well organised and have a committee structure which is increasingly focused on school improvement. Governors ask good questions and are seeking ways in which they can practically help you to concentrate more fully on the core purpose of the school – that of learning. You do not provide them with enough time to assimilate the information in preparation for their meetings, and this is a frustration for some of them.

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 acted swiftly to support the school. A local leader of education is now working in partnership with the school and is providing valuable support. Advisors have visited the school to provide support for the development of mathematics and literacy. The school's improvement partner has also visited the school, and was involved in the early stages of writing the action plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector