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Carol Hines
Headteacher
The Bluecoat School, Stamford
Green Lane
PE9 1HE

Dear Mrs Hines

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Bluecoat School, Stamford

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 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 October 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 the individual needs of pupils are better met during lessons, particularly those of more able pupils
- improve the consistency and quality of marking, particularly in mathematics
- extend leadership responsibilities beyond the headteacher
- reduce the number of action plans to one, clear document.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher, your subject leader for English, two representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plans were evaluated. You took me on a

tour of classrooms. We saw the learning that was taking place in every classroom, from the nursery to Year 6.

Context

No teachers have left the school or been appointed since you were recently inspected. Since September 2013, two teachers have been given responsibility for the development of teaching in English and mathematics.

Main findings

You have completely overhauled how pupils' progress is tracked. This, coupled with improvements in the accuracy of assessing work, means that teachers are now much better informed about their pupils' ability levels and the rates of progress being made. Underachieving individuals can now be identified more readily, as can the progress made by specific pupil groups, including those eligible for pupil premium funding. There is some evidence that this is beginning to impact on the quality of teaching.

Every teacher has had a personal development meeting with you in order to review their practice and set bespoke targets for improvement. Teachers are often helped to meet these targets through training opportunities. You intend to conduct a formal lesson observation of every teacher by the end of this term, and use the findings to review teachers' progress towards improving their practice.

You have appointed, from within your current staff, subject leaders for English and mathematics. As well as strengthening leadership in the school, pupils' progress in these subjects is now more closely evaluated. Teachers are held more closely to account for the performance of their pupils in these areas, and, where necessary, are given areas of improvement to focus on by the subject leaders.

The purpose of most staff meetings has changed. The majority of them are now focused on specific teaching and learning discussions as opposed to school administration. Teachers now meet for an hour every week with their teaching assistants to discuss pupil progress and how the needs of supported pupils can be best met. Teaching assistants now understand their role in pupils' learning more clearly; their status has been raised by taking part in these professional conversations.

You invited parents to an open evening which focused on increasing the attendance of your pupils, as this has been below the national average for each of the last two years. Attendance rates have increased since your recent inspection, though it is too early to judge the sustainability of this improvement.

Lots of activity to help accelerate pupil progress is taking place outside of lessons. However, individual pupils' needs are still not being met as well as they should be in normal lessons. This applies to more able pupils in particular.

While some excellent marking was seen in Key Stage 1 literacy, this was not the case in every class or subject. Formative marking is not consistent, particularly in mathematics, and particularly for more able pupils.

In your first year as headteacher, you personally took on the vast majority of leadership responsibilities as you were aware that the school was underperforming in many areas. This is not sustainable in the long term.

Governors have an outstanding level of knowledge regarding the school's areas for development and they know what needs to be done to improve outcomes for pupils. The Governing Body benefits from having members with extensive experience in education, including a current headteacher, a former headteacher and a former local authority school improvement adviser. They have increased their number of meetings to support the school's development, including meetings with you where they receive updates on your actions taken to improve pupils' progress. The governors are committed to evaluating the impact of the actions taken by you and your staff, and they are capable of doing so.

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

Since your recent inspection, the local authority representative has increased her commitment to the school by visiting more regularly with a view to supporting you. She will assist in evaluating the impact of actions taken to improve the school. The local authority representative is aware that some leadership responsibilities need to be formally allocated to members of staff other than you. In this light, she will investigate if local authority funding can be used to support this necessary development.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector