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Mrs Alison Cornell
Headteacher
Durrington Middle School
Salvington Road
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Dear Mrs Cornell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Durrington Middle School

Following my visit with Mandy Gard, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 28 and 29 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 us 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. A monitoring inspection of Durrington First School was carried out during the same period.

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:

- analyse pupils' progress in greater detail to determine how successfully different groups, sets and classes are achieving
- make sure all leaders' monitoring evaluates pupils' learning fully and that leaders follow up their checks systematically
- identify, with the help of the local authority, a school that makes good use of information on pupils' achievement for senior leaders to visit.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other leaders, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last

inspection. You observed lessons jointly with HMI in all year groups. Inspectors scrutinised more able pupils' writing and mathematics books.

Main findings

At the start of the monitoring inspection, senior leaders reported the school was improving strongly and felt it was on the way to being judged good at its next section 5 inspection. Her Majesty's Inspectors found the school was clearly improving but not to the extent that senior leaders asserted. There are some positive signs of improvement in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. Leaders are not analysing pupils' progress fully to demonstrate that it is becoming consistently good.

In the Year 6 tests and assessments, last year, attainment improved to slightly above average, the highest it has been for five years. This was largely down to significant improvement in mathematics. Reading and writing stayed broadly the same. The school's data, for each year group, points to pockets of good progress last year, notably in reading for Year 5 and in reading, writing and mathematics for Year 7. This was contrasted by slower progress though in reading and mathematics in Year 4.

The senior leaders check the proportion of pupils making good progress in each year group but do not consider the proportion making expected or too little progress. It is therefore difficult to draw reliable conclusions from such a 'broad brush' picture. Pupils' assessments need analysing in greater depth to find out which groups of pupils are doing well and which are not. There is an over-reliance on the average progress that pupils make in each year group when evaluating achievement. Leaders need to check pupils' progress in different classes and sets, to see if there are any marked differences. This deeper analysis would be valuable to put alongside the outcomes of other monitoring activities, such as observations of lessons or scrutiny of pupils' work. It would also provide useful information for managing the performance of teachers, making decisions on salary increases, and holding teachers and leaders to account for pupils' achievement.

Members of the governing body remain determined to play a strong strategic role. Governors rightly ask challenging questions to check that the school is moving in the right direction. They are knowledgeable about the overall quality of teaching, as indicated by the head teacher's monitoring. They need more information on the progress of different classes, sets and groups, to consider whether the picture on the quality of teaching aligns with how well pupils are achieving.

Aspects of teaching are improving and there is some good practice in the school on which to build. The marking policy related to 'green pen' marking was seen working well in Year 7. Here, pupils had a good understanding of their targets and were able to talk about what they needed to do to achieve them. In several year groups,

pupils' books show good progress over time and there is evidence of work being adapted for different abilities. In Year 7, different subjects are used to promote writing. Books show that teachers' expectations of the more able pupils tend to be higher in the middle school than in the first school. Even so, expectations are not yet consistently high and inspectors believe the school should be aiming for a greater proportion of pupils reaching the Level 5 by Year 6.

While improving, the quality of teaching in the school still has inconsistencies and this is reflected in senior leaders' overview of pupils' progress last year. Opportunities were missed to probe pupils' understanding and questions were not always targeted well at different groups. Although teachers use targets effectively in some classes, this is not yet widespread and there is variation in the approach that different teachers use across the school, which is confusing for pupils when they move class. In mathematics, more able pupils clearly find some work easy, with page after page of correct work. Some teachers' marking focuses more on how well pupils have worked rather than recognising the specific mathematical achievements or pointing to next steps.

The headteacher's judgements on the quality of teaching and learning were accurate on this monitoring visit. The deputy headteacher is still developing her skills and needs further coaching to build her expertise and confidence. Middle leaders have carried out some monitoring tasks. They have started to identify stronger and weaker aspects in the school's provision but they have not followed up their monitoring to check that their feedback to staff is bringing about greater consistency. They have not yet acquired a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in provision across both schools. This important aspect of leaders' work would benefit from greater rigour so that all leaders have a demonstrable impact on improving pupils' outcomes to good across the federated schools.

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 senior leaders would benefit from visiting a good or outstanding school that analyses its data effectively to check on how well different groups of pupils achieve.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector