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Ms C Beltran
Headteacher
Knutton St Mary's Primary School
Church Lane
Knutton
ST5 6EB

Dear Ms Beltran

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Knutton St Mary's Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2014, 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 any actions arising from the impending external review of governance are acted upon promptly.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority, and the attached consultant head teacher. The school improvement plan was evaluated, the school's records of pupil progress analysed and notes of recent Governor's meetings scrutinised. Observations of teaching and learning in several classes, a scrutiny of pupils' work and conversations with pupils about their learning took place.

Context

Since the inspection in October 2013, a member of teaching staff has resigned, and a member of the senior leadership team is on long term absence.

Main findings

The school has quickly responded to most of the points for improvement set out at the last inspection. School leaders have rightly assigned considerable time for training teachers and teaching assistants in a new approach to teaching reading through phonics. Now, pupils across the school from the Early Years Foundation Stage to Year 6 are grouped by reading ability then taught reading (or for the more able, spelling) in a common, intensive 30 minute session every day. The training has engendered a positive sense of common purpose amongst teachers as they collectively tackle the shortfalls identified by the recent inspection. It is increasing the skills of teachers and subject leaders alike.

Teachers, leaders and governors now have clear current school attainment and progress data that shows exactly what the shortfalls are. Many pupils were not achieving as well as they should in the Autumn term 2013, although some good progress is occurring with older pupils in mathematics. The school development plan addresses the points for improvement raised by the previous inspection. Some of the proposed actions need clear pupil attainment targets as success criteria. Governors now recognise that the local authority's view of the school as one that caused concern was accurate. They consider that many of the children attending the school come from families whose circumstances present some challenge. That is not the reason why the achievement of all pupils requires improvement. Governors need to act upon the independent information they have from the local authority about school performance that explains pupil outcomes.

Pupils are writing more frequently although the volume of their writing could usefully increase further. Teachers are demonstrating the patience and support needed to ensure pupils complete longer writing activities. In some cases they over-elaborate the requirements they place on pupils to plan an extended piece. A new approach that requires pupils to respond to marking of work is evident in English and mathematics books. Pupils can explain what they have to do in response to feedback from teachers, and are beginning to carry out the advice. In all of the lessons seen, the majority of pupils were engaged on activities that were well matched to their abilities and showed confidence and enjoyment of their learning. Occasionally, transitions between lesson activities provided scope for some pupils to waste time.

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 increased its support of the new head teacher, allowing her to tackle, with some urgency, previous underperformance in teaching. This is mainly through weekly meetings with a consultant head teacher. The consultants' school has provided expertise and training to Knutton subject coordinators. Subject leaders are also liaising with colleagues in other local schools to further develop their expertise. This is developing the schools skills in making accurate evaluations of teaching quality and pupil progress. Further subject leader training and development is planned to look carefully at mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector