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Mr John Starling
Headteacher
Bure Valley School
Hungate Street
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Norwich
NR11 6JZ

Dear Mr Starling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bure Valley School

Following my visit to your school on 27 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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:

- Raise expectations of teachers so that pupils consistently learn at levels that are higher than average for their age.
- Ensure that the accuracy of teachers' assessment is checked, especially for those pupils working at high levels.
- Change the emphasis of the school's lesson observation system so that it pays less attention to what teachers do and more to what pupils learn.
- Sharpen targets for the achievement of different groups and ensure that governors monitor progress towards targets with precision.
- Ensure that governors undertake training in the evaluation of school performance data.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, representatives of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. In addition, we visited six lessons to evaluate learning. I paid particular attention to assessed work and your lesson observation system.

Main findings

In the time since the last inspection, more details of the examination results for the summer of 2013 have been published. These show that pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is significantly higher than average. On leaving, their attainment is around average. This equates to slower progress than would be expected, given their starting points. Differences in the progress made by different groups, including boys and girls, are minimal.

Since the last inspection, you and your colleagues have realised that the reason for this underachievement is that lessons have not been pitched at a sufficiently high level. This is now being tackled quickly. A new curriculum based on 'challenges' has been implemented. Pupils are now challenged much more effectively in class and teachers respond quickly to the needs of individuals, whether they need more challenge or more support. As a result, the school has clear evidence that the progress that pupils are making is accelerating across all year groups. There is a clear consensus and vision for how the school will improve.

In lessons, pupils work well on tasks and challenges given. Without prompting, they readily move to more difficult work in almost all the classes visited. Pupils are enthusiastic and capable learners.

You have a sensible improvement plan based on the points identified in the last inspection. It is easily understood and actions are achievable with clear deadlines. Targets for the improvement of teaching are clear, but those for achievement are less well-defined and sometimes lower than many of the pupils are capable of achieving. You use the school's lesson observation system to monitor teaching regularly. However the documentation used places an emphasis on teacher activities rather than pupils' learning. This means that it is difficult to spot lessons in which teachers do not have high enough expectations and so learning is not as good as it should be.

You and your colleagues have a good understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses of the school lie. Governors are both supportive and challenging where appropriate. Records of their meetings do record these challenges, however targets for improvement are rarely discussed. This means that it is difficult for governors to monitor the progress that the school is making towards 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

You have decided to use the support offered by the local authority's 'Norfolk to good and great' programme. You have worked to pair with an 'outstanding' school and to exchange good practice. In addition, your school has received effective support from the local authority in areas of literacy and numeracy.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector