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Mr J Trueman
Headteacher
Silver Tree Primary School
Durham Road
Ushaw Moor
Durham
DH7 7LF

Dear Mr Trueman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Silver Tree Primary School, Durham

Following my visit to your school on 17 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 all middle leaders routinely monitor teaching across the school
- Urgently develop a partnership with the local authority's suggested partner school to enable teachers to observe good and outstanding teaching and leadership.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders, representatives from the governing body including the Chair of Governors. I also met with a representative from the local authority's education development service. I scrutinised the school improvement plan, minutes of the Governing Body meetings, your monitoring records of teaching that you have carried out since the inspection and details of pupils' achievement in each year group.

Context

Since the inspection governors have appointed a new coordinator for mathematics. One teacher remains on long-term sickness absence.

Main findings

You and the governing body wasted no time in developing a succinct improvement plan. Specific targets in the plan are enabling governors and local authority officers to check the impact of actions being taken to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and achievement. Plans have been regularly and accurately reviewed since the inspection, with detailed reports provided about the progress made to the governing body. This information, evidence from lessons we observed and your detailed tracking of pupils' achievements indicate that pupils' progress in English and mathematics is improving and changes to phonics teaching is making a positive difference to pupils' basic skills.

Because governors quickly reconfigured their committee structure there is now a stronger focus on checking whether actions are bringing about the improvements needed. They receive much more appropriate reports and information about pupils' progress. Governing body meeting minutes show they are much more challenging and ask more pertinent questions about the school's performance than they did previously. In addition, regular local authority steering group meetings are adding an additional layer of scrutiny which is helping the school to maintain its focus on driving improvement. 'Weekly meetings between you, senior team and the six Chairs of various committees ensure they are always up to date with the actions being taken and the monthly reports on the action plan enable them to see the impact of those actions.

The deputy headteacher and middle leaders are more involved in monitoring the work of the school. Changes they have implemented to teachers' planning, the use of assessment information in lessons and the detailed scrutiny of mathematics and English books carried out with local authority advisers has helped teachers to improve the quality and impact of their teaching. Together with the now regular in-school key stage meetings, this means everyone has a much more timely view of the progress pupils are making in class and progress towards actions in the action plan. Such work has enabled middle leaders to target additional support and interventions to pupils at risk of falling behind to help them catch up quickly. Middle leaders however do not have the range of skills necessary to monitor the quality of teaching. Plans need to be brought forward so they have the skills to support the required drive to improve all teaching to good or better by the target of summer 2014. Additionally, plans to enable teachers to visit other schools to look at good practice in teaching and assessment are not happening quickly enough.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will return in the summer term to check on the progress being made.

External support

The local authority acted quickly to increase the level of support to the school following the inspection. Actions taken by the maths and literacy advisers have already made a positive difference to the quality of teaching in mathematics and phonics and in the skills of leaders of those subjects to help them monitor teachers' planning and the quality of work in lessons. Good support and challenge from the education development partner is helping to build the skills of governors in checking the impact of actions and challenging you and middle leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector