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Rob Watson (Executive Head)
Gamlingay Village College
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Dear Mr Watson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gamlingay Village College

Following my visit to your school on 14 February 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 November 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 following the section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- make the improvement plans for 'getting to good' more specific to the school
- use the school environment to raise the profile of mathematics further still, following the example set in English
- increase teachers' planning for mathematics within the context of other subjects
- embed new policies designed to improve the teaching of mathematics, for example calculation
- make the good practice that is developing, for example in feedback and marking, consistent across all subjects and year groups

- ensure that minutes of governors' meetings reflect the high level of questions that hold school leaders to account
- make full use of Ofsted's resources and publications as examples of good practice.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the head of school, the lead practitioner for mathematics and the Chair of the Governing Body. I evaluated improvement plans, reviewed monitoring records, scrutinised a sample of mathematics books and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the previous inspection one teacher has left the school and has been replaced by a newly qualified teacher.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- reviewed and revised improvement plans, particularly your strategy to raise standards in mathematics
- provided staff training, following analysis of the training needs of teachers and support staff in relation to the teaching of mathematics
- held an 'every child a mathematician' day, following the success of a previous initiative designed to improve pupils' literacy
- increased parental involvement in learning about mathematics
- used pupil progress data about the achievement of different groups of pupils, to meet different pupils' needs more effectively
- widened the range of monitoring activities designed to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning
- added more detail to minutes of governors' meetings and appointed a new clerk to the governing body.

You have given the school a strong focus on improving mathematics, a key issue at the last inspection. Basing the Stratton Education Trust's lead practitioner for mathematics at the school is proving effective in building the skills and confidence of staff. The impact on pupils' achievement is particularly evident in Year 7 where pupils are now making the progress expected following previous underachievement. A range of evidence is now gathered to monitor pupils' progress in mathematics more regularly. This includes analysis of progress data, scrutiny of pupils' books and surveys of pupils' views. A programme of lesson observations by your mathematics leader starts shortly.

Professional development is proving effective because your mathematics leader has made expectations clearer, for example in the form of a new scheme of work for Years 5 and 6. Although at an early stage of implementation the new calculation policy is also contributing to better consistency in the methods used at the school. However, pupils' mathematics books indicate that some inconsistencies in the quality and feedback of marking remain. For example, not all teachers ensure that pupils are clear about how their work could be improved. More able pupils are making a better job than their peers of recording the advice given in their books.

Parents and carers are in a stronger position to support pupils' learning in mathematics, for example by working together in special books introduced for Year 6 pupils to use at home. The 'every child a mathematician day' increased the awareness of pupils, parents and carers about the many practical applications of mathematics. However although the profile of mathematics has been raised across the school, displays are not as engaging or widespread as those used to promote literacy. Teachers' lesson plans do not routinely show how opportunities to develop and apply mathematics in the context of different subjects are taken.

The mathematics improvement plan provides a useful framework for school leaders and governors to monitor the subject because the plan is specific to the school. Evaluation is helped by a clear baseline for improvements in mathematics. However, it is less clear in the overall Trust plan which other planned improvements are school-specific, and this adds complexity to monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, some priorities are evidently and sensibly shared. For example, the focus of the Trust on meeting the needs of different groups is having a positive impact on narrowing gaps in achievement at the school. Judicious use of shared leadership, staffing, resources and professional development is having a positive impact.

Governors are well-informed about the school and challenge school leaders robustly. However, although the governing body now records its meetings in more detail, minutes do not fully reflect their rigour in holding the school to account.

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 school works closely with Stratton Upper School as part of the Stratton Education Trust. The school shares the same executive headteacher and governing body. Some subject leaders and teachers work across both schools. This collaboration has proven successful in moving Gamlingay Village College from an Ofsted category of concern to 'requires improvement'. To complement the good partnership work developing the school would benefit from use of Ofsted's publications and examples of good practice available on its website.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector