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28 February 2014

Mrs L Clements
Headteacher
Purbrook Infant School
Aldermoor Road East
Waterlooville
PO7 5NQ

Dear Mrs Clements

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Purbrook Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 28 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The first monitoring inspection took place in May 2013. An advisory visit took place in November 2013.

At the first monitoring inspection in May 2013 school leaders and governors were taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. However, since the first monitoring inspection and the advisory visit, the pace of improvement has slowed and too much teaching still requires improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the headteacher and senior leaders provide stronger direction and an increased sense of ambition for the school
- link with a good or better school in order to see examples of effective teaching, rapid progress for pupils and strong leadership
- provide teachers with sufficient support and professional development in order to improve their work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, middle leaders and three members of the Governing Body, including the Chair of Governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I observed teaching in all classes, accompanied by the headteacher and evaluated a sample of pupils' books. I also evaluated the school's information on pupils' progress.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection there have been considerable changes to staffing. Two middle leaders have left the school. Two teachers are currently on maternity leave. Three teachers have joined the staff on part-time contracts. One member of staff is on long-term leave. The local authority has commissioned a seconded senior leader to support the school with the leadership of teaching. At the time of this monitoring inspection she had been in post for one day.

Main findings

Not enough progress has been made since the first monitoring inspection. School leaders, governors and the local authority have not been effective in securing the necessary improvements. The headteacher and senior leaders have not communicated their expectations clearly enough or shared their vision of how the school will look when it is good.

Current systems of recording and evaluating progress are too unwieldy and do not present a realistic picture of how well pupils are doing. Judgements on pupils' progress are not useful measures because they are based on comparisons with previous years, rather than the pupils' own starting points. Teachers do not systematically track pupils' progress against appropriate end of key stage or end of year targets. In the Reception Year it is not clear how children are being assessed or how frequently. Information in their learning journals is descriptive rather than evaluative and does not cover a wide enough range of learning goals.

Pupils' workbooks in Years 1 and 2 demonstrate that pupils are making some progress, particularly those pupils who have had continuity of teaching. However, progress is too slow. Although marking in most books is thorough and accurate, pupils do not have enough opportunities to respond to their teachers' comments. Regular handwriting practice has been introduced and younger pupils are taking more care with forming their letters correctly. However, there are still some older pupils who struggle with handwriting because they do not hold their pencils properly.

There have been some improvements to teaching and the learning environment in the Reception Year. During the inspection I observed some effective teaching in which children were patiently led through number-doubling activities, using a range of familiar and more challenging resources. The children then moved swiftly to well-planned adult-led and child-initiated activities that built on the earlier teacher input. However, this effective practice is not seen consistently in the Reception Year. There are not enough opportunities outside for pupils to develop rich language and to practise number work. Teachers' planning is not sufficiently focused on the needs of individual children or helpfully displayed to support all staff working in the Reception classes. It is not clear how teaching assistants' work is directed or what has been done to develop their skills. During the monitoring inspection I saw teaching assistants completing administrative tasks when they could have been supporting learning.

Clear principles for pupils' work are displayed in each classroom and teachers set learning objectives for every lesson. However, the learning objectives are not helpfully worded for infants to understand. When I spoke to pupils in Years 1 and 2, they were not able to tell me what the learning objective for the lesson meant. Similarly, some success criteria for tasks in lessons are overly complex, so pupils miss the main point of what they are learning.

Middle leaders follow the weekly monitoring plan and can point to improvements in their areas, such as problem solving in mathematics and provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. However, monitoring of teaching is not leading to rapid improvements because teachers are not given enough support with their day-to-day work.

Not enough has been done to improve the school environment since the last monitoring inspection visit. In many classrooms the book corners are uninviting because the books are shabby and crammed into boxes. Displays in some classrooms are not well-maintained or used effectively to support current topics. Poor use is made of corridor space to celebrate pupils' work, reinforce high standards and convey the character of the school.

Governors feel that the changes in staffing have unsettled the school and slowed improvements. They fully support the work the headteacher has done to ensure continuity of teaching and they are confident about the capacity of the middle leaders to improve the school. However, governors have not ensured that leaders provide teachers with clear direction and enough support.

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 not taken sufficiently urgent action to tackle the slow pace of improvement. The school has not been given enough support with strengthening leadership of teaching and developing expertise in the Reception Year. The local authority has not yet brokered a link with a good or outstanding school or sought a headteacher mentor. Increased support is necessary.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce
Her Majesty's Inspector