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The appropriate authority through the headteacher
Melbourn Primary School
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Dear Mrs Wilcox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Melbourn Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 March 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.

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 following the section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- sharpen your focus on improving mathematics, giving priority to the leadership of mathematics
- build on your transition work between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, to promote continuity in Years 3 and 4
- increase the range of subjects you are developing with Melbourn Village College, which has led to pupils' good achievements in art
- involve all staff in visits to different teachers' classrooms and to good or outstanding schools, to promote more consistently good practice
- make clearer the longer term strategy to move to good and outstanding, promoting innovative provision where appropriate.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, two phase leaders, three governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records, and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, several teaching groups have been reorganised to address pupils' underachievement in Years 3 and 4. Several new teachers have joined the school and more are being appointed, to replace staff that have left or are leaving.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written a termly operational plan, to ensure that the school responded promptly to the findings of the inspection
- developed a new vision for teaching and learning, to ensure that teachers, teaching assistants and governors share high expectations of pupils
- managed teachers' performance, to ensure that staff are clear about what is expected of them and to identify what professional development is required
- provided staff training in school and through external courses, to equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to increase their effectiveness
- widened the range of monitoring activities, in order to evaluate the impact of professional development on pupils' learning and achievement
- commissioned an external review of governance, to increase the level of challenge set by the governing body.

You started to take action soon after the inspection; your commitment to moving the school to good quickly is reflected in your termly operational plan. You are evaluating your plans regularly in order to adjust your approaches and maximise the impact of teachers and teaching assistants. You are analysing a wide range of evidence including pupils' views, pupil progress data and pupils' work. This evidence indicates that, although the quality of teaching is improving, inconsistencies remain.

In order to improve provision, particularly in Years 3 and 4, you have reorganised teaching groups to ensure that all phases (Early Years, Key Stage 1, lower and upper Key Stage 2) contain effective teaching and leadership. Although your actions are beginning to take effect improvements are not embedded yet and further changes are at the planning stage. This illustrates the need for a longer term overview so that staff, pupils, governors, parents and carers are clear about the school's journey to good.

You have communicated your progress so far to parents and carers. Parents and carers are engaging in activities that enable them to help their child progress. You have given staff constructive feedback about the quality of their teaching and the

impact of their leadership roles and responsibilities. This has created a changing but positive and supportive environment. For example, staff are working together to share what works best. This increased awareness of what is going well at the school should be supplemented with a more comprehensive programme of visits by staff and governors to schools that are already good or outstanding.

Working with other schools has proven effective in art. In this subject, collaboration with Melbourn Village College shows what is possible; the standards pupils have achieved in their recent project about 'eyes' are above average. However, not all subjects show that high standards are reached, through pupil progress data, pupils' work on display or in their books. In particular, pupils' work in mathematics often lags behind their literacy or topic work. The school's efforts to recruit a new subject leader of mathematics have not yet proven successful. The one mathematics training session provided by the local authority since the inspection has not been enough.

The school is moving forwards quickly where improvement builds on existing good practice but is stimulated by work in other educational settings; strategies that are personalised to Melbourn Primary School are gathering momentum. For example, the school is developing some innovative approaches to teaching and learning in Years 1 and 2 in order to build on the higher level of pupils' decision making in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 shared enthusiastically examples of their work, including photographs that showed them taking initiative.

Governors want the best for the school. This is reflected in the performance management of staff and in their approach to recruiting new teachers and leaders. The governing body accept the findings of the recent review of governance conducted by the National Governors' Association. In particular, governors are spending less time in meetings discussing operational matters and more time finding out about the quality and impact of provision. Governors' new link role to a specific phase and contribution to progress reviews is increasing their level of challenge.

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 the level of support since the school was judged to require improvement. Six visits by a school improvement adviser have focused on: work with the headteacher to write the termly operational plan; advice with staffing and the appointment of two new assistant headteachers; and joint lesson observations with senior leaders. Work scrutiny by an English adviser has helped to identify strengths and weaknesses in pupils' writing and in teachers' assessment. A training session by a mathematics adviser has started to focus attention on the subject. However, the level of mathematics support is not high enough to address with sufficient urgency the weaknesses identified at the last inspection.

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