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Mr Andrew Sparks
Headteacher
Cecil Road Primary and Nursery School
Cecil Road
Gravesend
Kent
DA11 7BT

Dear Mr Sparks

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cecil Road Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 4 April 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 December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- revise the school improvement plan so that it focuses on the areas identified for improvement at the time of the section 5 inspection
- identify challenging and measurable targets and milestones for attainment and progress
- enable senior leaders to coach, mentor and monitor the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics so that there is more rapid improvement in the areas identified for improvement
- ensure that governors, senior staff and local authority colleagues more rigorously and regularly monitor and evaluate progress.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, five governors and representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated a number of key documents such as the school improvement plan, the post Ofsted improvement plan, subject action plans, the review of governance and resulting action plan, monitoring information, records of local authority progress meetings and up-to-date pupil achievement data.

Main findings

The school has two improvement plans but neither has a sharp focus on the areas identified by the inspection in December 2013. There are overarching attainment targets for some year groups but there are no targets that specify an increase in the rates of progress that all pupils should achieve. The success criteria in the plans often re-state the actions rather than specifying what success will look like in terms of pupils' achievement. There are no interim targets or benchmarks to evaluate the impact of the actions at different points throughout the year.

Some action has been taken to address weaknesses. For example, timetabling arrangements have been revised to ensure that pupils have more time to write. When termly assessments of pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills are carried out, staff in each year group now meet with senior leaders to evaluate pupils' achievement and identify next steps. Improvements in some teachers' understanding of pupils' achievement are evident in the records of these meetings. The literacy and mathematics leaders have produced subject improvement plans, supported staff with planning and have monitored pupils' work. There have been staff training opportunities but these have not all been sharply enough focused on the specific aspects requiring the most rapid improvement. When they have been appropriate, such as on matching work to meet the needs of different ability groups they have not been followed up with sufficient monitoring or support to ensure that staff are adapting their teaching accordingly. Since the inspection in December 2013, the two deputy headteachers have had limited opportunities to coach and mentor staff in the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics. This is a pity because in the year groups where they, and the subject leaders, have been able to closely support their colleagues, there is evidence of improvement.

The most recent checks on pupils' reading, writing and mathematics skills show that pupils in some year groups are making better progress, particularly in Key Stage 1 and Year 6. In the past pupils did not achieve well in some year groups and had to make up the lost ground in the following years. There are still year groups where pupils have made slower progress so far this year but the differences are not as great as in the past. Nonetheless, there are year groups where progress is slow and these have not been the focus for improvement.

A review of governance has been carried out and a governors' action plan is in place to address weaknesses. Some governors have undertaken training to help them understand and make better use of pupils' achievement information. They also found recent training in understanding their roles and responsibilities a valuable opportunity to spend time together as a group. However, neither the full governing body nor any committees have met since February to evaluate whether the actions taken since the inspection are leading to improvements. Individual governor's monitoring visits have not always focused on the areas identified for improvement.

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 improvement advisor has provided training for staff, and governors. The records of the six weekly progress meetings show that the local authority is providing challenge to the school and there has been, rightly, a strong focus on pupils' achievement, however they do not cover all of the specific areas identified by the inspection as requiring improvement. An external consultant has carried out lesson observations but targets for improvements are not followed up by school leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheena MacDonald
Her Majesty's Inspector