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Mrs V Favell
Headteacher
Southwood Infant School
Southwood Lane
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Dear Mrs Favell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southwood Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 3 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 January 2014. 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:

- amend the school improvement plan to include sharply focused actions which directly link to improving rates of pupils' progress
- ensure the success of the actions are closely linked to measuring pupils' progress
- use the information the school has on the attainment and progress of all groups of pupils to plan the expected gains in pupils' achievement over time and include this in the school improvement plan
- ensure there is a clear distinction between those responsible for leading actions within the school improvement plan and those responsible for monitoring the progress being made, so that staff are held to account

- make sure the quality of pupils' learning in lessons is the key focus when judging the quality of teaching and rigorously follow up areas for improvement identified during lesson observations
- place a greater emphasis on analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's strategies for improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the acting deputy headteacher, three members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. We walked around the school and looked at some work in pupils' books. I also met with a small group of pupils from Year 1 and 2. I scrutinised a range of documents and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Main findings

School leaders and governors were shocked at the outcome of the inspection. Nevertheless, they quickly accepted that improvements were required to increase rates of pupils' progress, particularly for those in receipt of pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and pupils who have a parent working in the armed forces) and for higher ability pupils. Systems are being put in place to check on the school's progress more thoroughly. However, at present, these new systems of monitoring school improvement and checking more regularly on the rates of pupils' progress and not being analysed with sufficient rigour. Although you meet with teachers to discuss pupils' progress, the outcomes of these meetings are unclear. Some planned monitoring activities have not taken place. School leaders need to take a much more robust approach to monitoring pupils' progress in order to quickly address underachievement and ensure the learning needs of all pupils are met, monitored carefully and evaluated vigorously.

The school improvement plan is linked to the areas identified for improvement in the inspection report. However, the planned actions and the expected success of the actions are not linked closely enough to the expected gains in pupils' progress. School leaders are beginning to gather more information on the attainment and progress of pupils throughout the year, but they have not used this information to set milestones for the achievement of different groups of pupils. The roles and responsibilities for implementing and monitoring some actions within the plan are, in some cases, the same member of staff. The monitoring responsibilities need to be separated to ensure lines of accountability are clear.

You are beginning to check on the quality of teaching more regularly. However, there is insufficient emphasis on the rates of pupils' progress for all groups of pupils within lessons. Too often judgements relate to what the teacher is doing, rather

than the learning taking place for all groups of pupils. School leaders need to use a wider range of information to judge the quality of teaching over time, linked to lesson observations, the progress seen in pupils' work, the quality of teacher's planning and assessment, as well as the information on pupils' attainment and progress.

The governing body is taking suitable action to hold school leaders and teachers to account. They recognised that their questioning and challenge to school leaders was not rigorous enough. They are now challenging school leaders more thoroughly through questioning and requesting more clarity on the school's information on pupils' progress. They are also making regularly visits to the school to observe the school's work and check on the progress of particular strategies, such as the relatively new system for teaching phonics (the sounds that letters make). They are aware that some of the information they receive, particularly in relation to the pupil premium fund spending, is not sufficiently clear to enable a thorough evaluation on the impact of this allocation of funding on the progress of this group of pupils. At the time of the monitoring visit, the external review of the school's use of pupil premium had not taken place. This needs to be undertaken urgently to ensure that the planned spending of pupil premium for the next financial year maximises pupils' achievement.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. Please send me your undated school improvement plan by the end of May and regular updates to the school self-evaluation. Each time you gather data on pupils' attainment and progress, please send me this information, together with the analysis and evaluation of pupils' progress.

External support

The local authority is providing medium priority support for the school. Additional support has included advice and guidance for English and mathematics subject leaders and guidance on the planning for and use of pupil premium funding. The leadership and learning partner is supporting the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher to increase leadership capacity within the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Henderson
Her Majesty's Inspector