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29 April 2014

Mrs Jane Sculpher
Headteacher
Sandy Lane Primary School
Sandy Lane
Bracknell
Berkshire
RG12 2JG

Dear Mrs Sculpher

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Sandy Lane Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteachers, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated. I visited Key Stage 2 classrooms with you, and I reviewed the school's single central record to check safeguarding procedures for newly appointed staff.

Context

Since the inspection an additional deputy headteacher has been appointed and joined the school in April 2014. In addition, a new Year 3 teacher has been appointed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Following the inspection you worked quickly to adapt the school action plan to address the identified areas for improvement. You have set challenging targets for pupil achievement at all levels and are ensuring that progress towards these targets is closely monitored and evaluated. One teacher commented that staff feel they are driven 'fiercely but with compassion' by your determined aspiration for the school to become good.

The leadership team has recently been strengthened by the appointment of an additional deputy headteacher who will lead work on improving the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Training from external consultants has been brokered by the local authority for the senior leadership team. This is helping leaders to base their lesson observation judgments on a wider range of evidence, including pupils' progress over time and the quality of teachers' marking and lesson planning. These judgments now need to feed into bespoke training for teachers to ensure more rapid improvement in standards of teaching.

Useful work with the local authority school improvement advisor has resulted in the development of more rigorous tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress. This has helped you to identify those pupils in need of additional support; you are now evaluating how well this support has worked and adjusting it as required to make sure that it is working to raise achievement.

There has been helpful training for all teachers in how to understand and use information on pupils' progress. This means that they are now better able to challenge pupils to achieve higher levels and has resulted in some improvements in the levels and speed of progress in several year groups. The progress of girls in Key Stage 1 is now more promising; however, it remains below target at Key Stage 2. The progress of pupils eligible for additional government funding is not yet showing signs of improvement and this must be addressed urgently.

Teachers have benefited from sharing practice in the teaching of phonics with a partner school, led by a local leader of education (LLE), to develop their skills in this area. Senior leadership and local authority observations of the teaching of phonics at Key Stage 1 have shown early signs of improving standards and no inadequate teaching last term, but there is still work to do for it to become consistently good.

You have focused robustly on improving standards in mathematics. In addition to support offered by your partner school you have brokered the services of an external mathematics consultant to work with teachers and to review the impact of this training. On a recent visit, pleasingly he found elements of outstanding teaching. As a result of this work, pupils are making better progress in mathematics than in previous years, and at Key Stage 1, standards have risen to higher than the national average. However, at Key Stage 2, the legacy of previously weaker teaching has not

yet been overcome. Although the gap is closing, particularly for the most-able pupils, it is not closing quickly enough for Year 6 pupils to reach national standards overall.

Much of your focus has been on raising the expectations of all teachers of pupils' behaviour in the classroom and of what they can achieve when challenged to do so. Although some signs of improved engagement were seen during our visits to classrooms, too many teachers were still not insisting on a sharp enough focus on learning from all pupils and some of the children reported finding their work easy. For example, pupils in Year 3 were measuring the perimeter of simple shapes but did not have a sense of the wider relevance of this activity, leading to some noisy and unfocused classroom behaviour.

A governance review was carried out in March 2014. The governing body is now much clearer about the need to constructively challenge the senior leaders about the rate of improvement in standards. Governors recognise the importance of better understanding of information on pupils' progress and have undertaken training in several areas to improve their skills. A governor with responsibility for the progress of those children eligible for additional government funding now works much more closely with the school to monitor the impact of this funding on how well these pupils achieve. A restructuring of the governing body committees has also taken place. As yet, the governing body has had a limited impact on the improvement of standards in the school and urgently needs to demonstrate a greater rigour in its strategic leadership role.

The local authority has offered appropriate and well-targeted support for the school and the senior leaders through a range of activities, including work with a partner school. A Management Intervention Board (MIB) has been set up through which the Chair of the Governing Body and the headteacher are held to account by local authority officers every half term. Regular monitoring visits take place by the school improvement advisor to review standards of teaching and learning.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Bracknell Forest. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar
Her Majesty's Inspector