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Chris Field
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Field

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kennet Valley Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 May 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the governing body provide an appropriate level of challenge to senior leaders about the progress the school is making
- ensure that leaders' observations of lessons more effectively evaluate how well teaching impacts on the progress of different groups of pupils
- strengthen the way in which targets are used to improve pupils' work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated a range of documentation including the school action plan, information relating to pupils' progress and information relating to the monitoring of teaching. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to most classes.

Context

Since the inspection one new teacher has joined the school.

Main findings

Judgements made at the last inspection were accepted by yourself and the governing body. Your own analysis of what needed to improve largely matched the findings of the inspection. You and your deputy are determined to drive improvements forward and have swiftly focused on appropriate actions.

You are using information about how well pupils are doing in a more systematic way to identify where there are gaps in pupils' progress and to direct support to where it is needed. You are also using this information to identify where teachers might benefit from training or support to improve their practice. As a result, teachers have received targeted support and are more frequently sharing good practice with each other.

You have rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching as a key priority. The review of the school's teaching and learning policy has resulted in a more rigorous approach to teaching and a raising of expectations of the progress pupils will make. Teachers receive clear and detailed information when you monitor or observe their teaching but there is too little emphasis in this feedback about the impact of teaching on the progress of different groups of pupils.

Important changes have been made to the way teachers plan their lessons, so that activities more closely match pupils' needs. You have provided valuable training to teachers and teaching assistants to develop their questioning skills. Your monitoring shows that teachers are using questions more effectively to present challenge to pupils. Teaching assistants have more personalised and detailed targets so that their roles and responsibilities have been clarified and strengthened. Teachers and teaching assistants are working more closely together so that teaching assistants have a better understanding of what is planned in the lesson and how they can contribute to pupils' progress.

You have reviewed and revised your marking policy so that pupils are given specific guidance on how they can improve their work. Additionally, teachers are setting longer-term targets for pupils. However there is inconsistency about how well pupils use these in their work and how often they are reviewed and updated as pupils move on in their learning.

A key area for improvement has been the development of pupils' mathematical skills. The comprehensive mathematics action plan has appropriately focused on the teaching and development of key skills. You have raised the profile and importance of these mathematical skills in a variety of ways, for example through your rewards system, displays around the school and mathematical competitions. A useful workshop for parents took place to explain how the school teaches mathematics and

how parents can support their children with this work. Progress in mathematics is improving across the school.

Opportunities for extended writing have been increased because teachers are planning this into their lessons explicitly and are setting aside longer periods of time to allow pupils to write at greater length. The introduction of interesting subjects such as 'pirates' has encouraged pupils to write longer pieces of work, when they have previously been reluctant to write.

Valuable changes have been made to the way phonics (the sound letters and words make) is taught so that there is now a consistent approach across the school. Advisors from the local authority have provided useful support for this work. You are assessing pupils' progress in reading more frequently and teaching pupils in small groups according to their needs and progress. Pupils are making better progress in their reading.

Significant improvements have been made to the library. Your work to listen to pupils' views means that non-fiction and fiction books are now provided and the purchase of a number of electronic reading devices has encouraged more reluctant readers to explore a wider range of texts.

Governors have undertaken an external review with the local authority. This has identified a range of actions the governing body should take to strengthen its practice. Key among these is the need for governors to present greater challenge to senior leaders about the progress the school is making. The governing body recognises that this is an important area for development.

External support

The local authority has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. It has provided useful support for the development of the planning and teaching of mathematics. The Early Years Advisor has given effective guidance in setting priorities for the planning and assessment of phonics. The governing body continue to benefit from well-targeted training and support from the local authority's governor services advisor who has identified key areas for improvement in their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Lisa Moore

Her Majesty's Inspector