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Mrs Karen Joyce
Headteacher
Somerlea Park Junior School
Bank Street
Somercotes
Alfreton
DE55 4JE

Dear Mrs Joyce

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Somerlea Park Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, a group of eight pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring inspection. I evaluated your plans for improvement. I visited four lessons following scrutiny of documentation relating to your checks on the quality of teaching. I reviewed your most recent data relating to pupils' achievement. I considered the quality of pupils' learning in a range of subjects.

Main findings

Senior leaders' work to improve the school has not been consistently effective across all of the areas for improvement. Improvements in governance and in the teaching of writing and mathematics are undermined by slow progress to improve reading.

The school needs to address this urgently in order to regain the pace of improvement identified at the first monitoring inspection.

You have begun to introduce a range of initiatives targeted at improving pupils' skills in reading. Although pupils say that these changes have made reading more enjoyable, the improvements are not raising standards quickly enough. Senior leaders need to undertake urgent action to check that teachers' assessments of pupils' skills in reading are accurate. This is to ensure that teachers are able to plan and deliver suitable activities which will accelerate pupils' progress in reading in Years 3, 4 and 5.

Governors have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities, following an external review of their work. They are undertaking more regular visits to the school to gather information on how well the school is doing. They are able to hold senior leaders to closer account for the rate of improvement because of the clear milestones relating to pupils' achievement, which are recorded in the school development plan.

You have introduced a more rigorous approach to checking on the quality of teaching. Teachers are provided with clearer guidance and support on how to improve their practice. Teachers have developed their skills in assessing pupils' achievement, particularly in writing and mathematics. This has helped them to gain a better understanding of the next learning steps for pupils. Consequently, pupils are being provided with more challenging work. Pupils say that the new marking code, 'blue-marking', has helped them to understand more clearly what they have done well and what they have to do next to improve their work to reach their targets. As a result of these changes, teaching is improving.

The leader of English is checking more closely on the quality of pupils' writing. Her checks have led to teachers giving pupils more opportunities in which to produce longer pieces of writing across a range of subjects. Pupils' skills in handwriting are improving. This is because of more regular practice and an expectation that pupils apply their skills in all their work. This has helped pupils to make faster rates of progress in writing.

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 advisor has provided effective support to the school. He has helped senior leaders to develop their skills in drawing upon a wider range of evidence to check on the quality of teaching. Teachers have been supported to develop their skills in making more accurate assessments of the standards of pupils' work in writing and mathematics.

Teachers have benefited from observing teaching at Duckmanton Primary School.

This has helped to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

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

Yours sincerely

David Carter

Her Majesty's Inspector