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Karen Sheridan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Sheridan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Malmesbury Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 findings of the mini and external reviews of governance are included in immediate changes to the Ofsted action plan when they are both complete
- tighten the action plan by providing a sharper plan summary and by clarifying senior leaders' and governors' accountabilities
- use the school's monitoring timetable to ensure that the staff performance management system is implemented consistently by all leaders.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, your deputy and assistant headteachers, the school business manager, the Chair and two members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and two middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me on a short tour of the school during which we made brief visits to lessons. I spoke with a group of pupils and examined a sample of pupils' work. I evaluated the school's internal performance information, minutes of governing body meetings and the school and local authority action plans.

Context

Since the last inspection, three teachers and one teaching assistant have left the school. Three newly qualified teachers, an experienced teacher, and three teaching assistants started this September. One phase leader has begun a maternity leave for the majority of this academic year.

Main findings

You have insisted that leaders check the quality of teaching more frequently. This has made a difference already. Leaders have ensured that teachers have received better training in improving the quality of marking. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants provide more effective feedback in pupils' books and pupils now know how to improve. The same rigour now needs to be used in setting harder work for pupils. Sometimes work is not completed to the required depth and standard by pupils and teachers are not ensuring this is so. This is particularly important for more able pupils who say that they are not challenged sufficiently in all subjects all of the time.

Senior leaders have developed a very clear staff performance management policy. They increasingly hold all middle leaders to account for pupils' progress. They should now ensure that middle leaders do likewise for those they manage. The fortnightly work scrutiny and moderation meetings are helping all staff. In these meetings, subject leaders show other staff how to develop greater challenge in pupils' work. Such coaching is already having positive impact on staff performance, and, therefore, in lessons and pupils' books. This training now needs to enable teachers to set more difficult tasks for more able pupils.

Most pupils are motivated by teachers' more demanding expectations of them, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teachers are providing more stimulating lessons which challenge pupils' learning. The teaching of writing is improving. Early Years teachers, for example, are planning more challenging writing activities which excite and engage the children.

Senior leaders have a very good understanding of the improvements needed in the school, and they have produced a robust action plan and monitoring timetable. Your decision to structure the plan around the four key areas for improvement makes accountabilities easier to track. However, the plan needs to identify which senior leader and which governor will have responsibility for each of the four strands. This will enable tighter monitoring of the school's progress.

Governors are beginning to understand the magnitude of their roles. They have responded swiftly to the findings of the most recent inspection by arranging very quickly a mini review of governance and a deeper full review. The local authority's mini review has been published and its recommendations are incisive. These should be implemented in full.

The gradual improvement in the school's Key Stage 2 national tests in 2014 is encouraging. Pupils' achievement in writing has improved, although there is more to do to strengthen reading and mathematics. The implementation of better reading and mathematics programmes is intended to help with this. The school identifies accurately that improving the achievement of its more able pupils is a priority. The provision of specialist teaching in Year 6 is making a difference.

The picture is also improving in Key Stage 1. The average points score for reading, writing and mathematics has risen in 2014, although there remains a small gap between the school and national outcomes in writing and reading. Outcomes are above the national average in mathematics.

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 support provided by the local authority, including through the emerging partnerships with good and outstanding primary schools, is helping the school to improve. The support is wide ranging and, in some areas, notably in the teaching of writing, has already had considerable impact. Comprehensive support is planned by the local authority, for example, in improving the teaching of mathematics and in implementing the findings of the imminent external review of governance. Governors are confident the partnership with the Chair of the Governing Body with a local outstanding governing body will provide further strength for the governing body.

The school is making effective use of a number of expert consultants, including partnerships with experts from higher education institutions. They hold a wealth of experience and knowledge. The partnership with Brunel University has already resulted in improvements in both the leadership and teaching of mathematics. The school should now focus on developing the partnerships with their partner primary schools, since this should provide additional strength in subject leadership.

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

Yours sincerely

Debbie Clinton
Her Majesty's Inspector