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Mr Andrew Sierant
Headteacher
Manor Farm Community Junior School
Rose Avenue
Hazlemere
High Wycombe
HP15 7PH

Dear Mr Sierant

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Manor Farm Community Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 16 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:

- strengthen the action plan so it is clear what will happen, when and how progress will be checked and impact evaluated
- get the action plan back on track as quickly as possible
- review the use of pupil premium funding and put specific plans in place to close the gap for disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your senior team, middle leaders, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and looked at other key documents. We walked around school to see classes at work.

Context

One teacher left the school in July and has not been replaced due to a fall in pupil numbers. The number of Year 6 classes has reduced to two. The school has also had to lose three learning support assistants.

Main findings

It is clear from talking to you, senior leaders and governors that the findings of the recent inspection were not a surprise. You all fully accept the improvements that are needed. As a senior leadership team you had already identified, and shared with governors, the school's weaknesses. You know that pupils are capable of achieving more, particularly in writing and which aspects of teaching need to improve.

Your action plan is your key working document. It builds on the plans to improve English and mathematics that began last term. Rightly, it is closely linked to the priorities identified by the inspection, setting out how you intend to improve teaching, raise achievement and strengthen leadership and management. In the main, the actions are appropriate. However, the plan is not precise enough in some respects, for example about developing the teaching of writing or closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils. It lacks detail about the steps that will be taken and specific start and finish dates, which means there is potential for slippage. A planner, mapping activities across the term, might help you and your senior leaders avoid overload points and ensure that improvements stay on track. Success criteria need to be measurable so that it is clear what the school is aiming for, with clear milestones to check progress along the way.

Work has begun to tackle some of the issues. A new way of handwriting has been introduced and the policy for marking pupils' work and giving them feedback has been reviewed. It is early days, but there is evidence from looking at pupils' books that their handwriting and the presentation of their work is getting better. Staff I talked to realise how marking can be used more effectively to help pupils improve their work. Your deputy has changed the way that data is presented to make the achievement of different groups of pupils clearer, particularly for governors. We discussed your plans to use assessment information to improve pupils' progress. Regular monitoring should take account of pupil progress data as well as information from observations of lessons and pupils' work to check the quality of teaching. Further analysis, such as looking at the achievement of those pupils who often arrive at school late would be helpful.

There has been some slippage in other areas. In part, this is because you are waiting for confirmation of what external support will be provided. It is also due to staff absence at the beginning of term. Little has been done to make sure that work is always set at the right level for all pupils. This needs addressing as a matter of

priority. Recent tests show that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates is not closing and that lower attaining pupils tend to make slower progress than others. As yet, there has been no analysis of what additional support helps these pupils or how well the pupil premium funding has been used. This needs to happen quickly so that you can plan more specifically how to close the gap.

You know that the responsibility for improvement cannot lie solely with senior leaders. Key middle leaders are starting to help staff and check on their areas of responsibility. They still need support, however, to take on these responsibilities because their experience and training varies.

The review of governance, including the use of pupil premium funding, has not taken place. It should be arranged as soon as possible. Governors have, however, started to review the way they work and are making the most of training to develop their skills. The full governing body met to discuss the action plan earlier this term and has scheduled an additional meeting each term to review the school's progress. The teaching and learning committee has a clear brief to look at pupils' achievement in more detail. The cycle of meetings has been changed to make sure that the committee has all the information it needs in the future. It is too early, however, to see whether governors are challenging senior leaders more effectively because the committee has not met this term. Individual governors are beginning to link with leaders and make visits to the school to get a better understanding of its work.

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

You feel that the local authority did not know the school well prior to the recent inspection. That is changing. The local authority has brought forward its annual review. It has allocated a new adviser to support and challenge the school this term and arranged for a significant amount of support from a local school. However, exactly what that support will be for, and when it will happen, has not been agreed yet. Early discussions have not considered support for improving pupils' writing despite it being a key priority. It is crucial that the support package is agreed and put in place without further delay.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector