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20 October 2014

Mrs C Noble
Headteacher
The Castle Primary School
Barrington Street
Tiverton
EX16 6QR

Dear Mrs Noble

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Castle Primary 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 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.

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:

- improve the evaluation of teaching by exemplifying what aspects of the lessons were most effective and why
- enhance the initiatives to engage with families of vulnerable pupils
- make sure governors demonstrate the impact of their use of pupil premium funding to raise attainment.

Evidence

During the half-day inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, both assistant headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The inspector undertook a tour of the school visiting classrooms and

looked at pupils' writing in books and on display. Pupils' progress tracking information and the outcomes of monitoring activities were also evaluated.

Context

Senior leadership and subject leadership have been re-organised. There are seven newly appointed teachers, four of them newly qualified. The newly qualified teachers are being supported through the Devon school centred initial teacher training scheme.

Main findings

Leadership roles and responsibilities are clear. Both the assistant headteachers capably articulate the vision for the school. The school action plans are effectively driving improvement.

School leaders' effective monitoring has led to much more consistent teaching of writing. High attainers and vulnerable pupils see themselves as 'young writers' and seek to meet the high expectations the school has of them. The capacity of the English subject team to effect improvement is also demonstrated by the recent good results in the phonics screening check.

Teachers are receiving expert guidance from the assistant headteacher in teaching mathematics. The hands-on approach, combined with comprehensive staff development and training, is helping teachers to deepen pupils' mathematical knowledge and reasoning skills. Pupils' confidence as problem solvers is exciting.

We sampled the teaching and learning observation forms that report on the 'drop-in' visits to lessons. These 'drop-in' visits are a useful strategy for following up on and identifying whole school issues. The 'drop-in' evaluations do not provide clarity about the impact of the teaching on the progress made by pupils of differing ability.

The reading workshops for parents and homework clubs are both potentially useful strategies in engaging with families. The entrance to the school is more inviting to parents. However, the celebration of pupils' work and the emphasis you are giving to reading are not immediately evident to parents.

The governing body is clearly focused on the raising attainment plan. Governors have responded quickly to the training they have received and are providing challenge and support to you and the school. The core group are keeping a close track on the progress data, in a format that they can manage. This monitoring rightly highlights the difference in achievement between vulnerable pupils and others. Governors' accountability for the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding is not well documented.

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 has provided good support through the targeted intervention and support programme. This support has been instrumental in challenging weak teaching and improving English.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector