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20 November 2014

Mrs Sue Adams
The Headteacher
Southdown Junior School
Mount Road
Southdown
Bath
BA2 1LG

Dear Mrs Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southdown Junior School

Following my visit, with Karen Gannon HMI, to your school on 20 November 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 April 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other staff members, the Chair of the Governing Body, three other governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The inspector also met with a group of pupils and looked at their work books. The school improvement plan was also evaluated.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in June 2013, the school has federated with the neighbouring infant school. The headteacher of the infant school is now leading both schools. The school's deputy headteacher has been appointed as the federation's

deputy headteacher. An assistant headteacher has been appointed to take responsibility for ensuring pupils' safety and well-being. In addition, three teachers and two teaching assistants have been appointed.

Main findings

The previous monitoring inspection raised serious concerns that neither the school's leaders nor the governing body were taking effective action to tackle the areas identified as requiring improvement. During that visit, the school's improvement plan was judged not to be focused sharply enough on the areas needing improvement. Leaders were criticised for not being robust enough in their monitoring and evaluation of the improvement plan and governors were singled out for not paying enough attention to pupils' progress.

As a result of the school's slow response to the previous inspection findings, insufficient action was taken to improve matters. Consequently, pupils' achievement in 2014 did not improve on the previous year's results.

The 2014 Key Stage 2 results show that the proportion of Year 6 pupils reaching the standard expected nationally was lower than the previous year. The attainment of the Year 6 girls and the Year 6 boys is broadly similar, but girls' results were higher for English grammar, punctuation and spelling. Pupils did not make enough progress across the key stage. Disadvantaged pupils reached similar levels to other pupils at the school in all subjects except English grammar, punctuation and spelling, where their results show them to be behind by about a year and a half. Pupils with special educational needs achieved well.

However, since the decision to federate with the infant school, there have been some very significant changes, as a new leadership team and governing body are now in place to lead the school. The headteacher is providing the strong and resolute leadership needed. She has a very clear view about the challenges the school faces. She has worked closely with the governing body to quickly implement strategies to improve the quality of teaching, which involved reviewing and restructuring the school's staff.

The school's other senior leaders are making a greater contribution to the school's work and providing the headteacher with appropriate support. They are each responsible for specific aspects of the school's provision and they are introducing new systems to raise expectations and monitor progress. As yet, many of the procedures being implemented are relatively new and have not had time to be fully embedded and improve pupils' progress.

The governors are a strong team who are committed to strengthening the school's provision and improving pupils' performance. They complement the school's leadership team very well. They are demonstrating the skills needed to challenge the senior leaders and hold them to account for progress being made implementing the school's improvement plan. The governors are very clear about the challenges being

faced. They have a clear understanding of the current priorities, particularly the need to improve pupils' literacy skills.

The school's improvement plan details the action being taken to improve pupils' performance. It includes quantifiable targets, which can be used to measure progress. The plan identifies the lead individuals for each aspect. As yet, it does not make clear who has responsibility for monitoring the impact of each action and neither does it provide the specific dates when progress will be assessed. The current targets for judging the impact of the plan on raising pupils' performance are not aspirational enough.

Importantly, the staff are pleased that positive action is being taken to improve the school. Morale is good and the staff are committed to the initiatives being introduced.

One of the school's key priorities is the need to improve the quality of teaching. The senior leaders are working to ensure that high quality teaching is evident across the school. There is a strong and appropriate focus on raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Senior leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching by scrutinising pupils' work and observing teaching. The school's evaluation of teaching recognises that it is not yet of a high enough standard to ensure that pupils are making good progress.

The subject leaders for English and mathematics are revising the school's policies for teaching pupils the basic skills of handwriting and spelling and improving their understanding of calculation methods. This approach is helping teachers to know and understand how they are expected to teach pupils to learn new skills and build on their previous work.

To support pupils to improve their reading and literacy skills, the school is creating a library and introducing a new reading scheme. Staff are also taking greater responsibility for promoting in pupils an enjoyment of reading and a love of books. Pupils' writing skills are being developed through additional opportunities to write in other subjects.

In most classes, pupils behave well and respond well to teachers' instructions. The school is taking strong action to support pupils who exhibit poor behaviour. As a result, the number of incidents of poor behaviour is reducing.

External support

The school got off to a slow start and only began to take strong action when the decision was taken to federate and work with the neighbouring infant school. Once this decision had been agreed the school's leaders quickly began to introduce change. As a result, firm foundations have been laid for the school's future development. The school is now poised to move forwards and, with the support of the local authority, is well placed to do so.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Bath and North East Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Ken Buxton
Her Majesty's Inspector