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Mr Nathan Butler-Broad
Headteacher
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Spurcroft Road
Thatcham
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Dear Mr Butler-Broad

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Spurcroft Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 December 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 September 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

- embed systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work, so that plans stay on track and leaders focus on the impact on achievement and what more can be done to improve pupils' learning.

Evidence

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

Context

There have been no staff changes since the inspection. The English leader is leaving at Christmas. Her responsibilities will be covered by other teachers in the spring term. You have appointed a replacement. She will join the school in April 2015.

Main findings

It is clear that you and your senior leaders, middle leaders and governors all fully accept the findings of the recent inspection. Senior leaders had identified the improvements needed and put plans in place to address them last school year. You know that pupils should be achieving more, especially in writing, and that key to this is ensuring consistently high-quality teaching.

There is a greater sense of urgency to the work to improve the school following the inspection. The development plan has been reviewed, with more detail about the steps that will be taken to improve teaching and pupils' achievement. The overall goals in the plan are explicit, suitably ambitious and follow logically from one to the next. You are aiming for all teaching to be good by January 2015 and for every pupil to have made good progress by July 2015. Ultimately, you want Spurcroft to be a good school again within two years. The priorities for this school year, and the actions taken so far, are appropriate. The plan has sufficient detail about activities this half term, how progress will be monitored and by who. It is too vague, however, about what will happen term-by-term and start and finish dates are not always specific. Without a clear overview there is a danger of slippage or overload. The targets you have set for pupils' attainment in July 2015 will enable you to measure how successful you have been. The termly milestones will not, however, help you to easily check progress. They are based on predictions of what pupils will achieve by the end of the year, rather than their actual attainment at that point.

You and your senior leaders acknowledge that monitoring of the school's work has not been effective enough in the past. To this end, you have developed a monitoring timetable which sits alongside your development plan. The intention is that each week leaders across the school will monitor the same aspect of teaching or achievement, discuss findings as a team and decide on next steps. Middle leaders have action plans for their areas of responsibility and are expected to evaluate the impact of their work each half term. Talking to leaders, it is evident that there is more to do to embed these systems and make sure everyone fully understands them. Leaders do not always focus enough on the impact on pupils' learning when they review their plans. There is no check that all the actions have been taken. It is early days, but senior leaders have begun to review the overall development plan more regularly and identify what needs to happen next. At this point, it is more a check on implementation than impact. The key questions you have set out should help you evaluate if different aspects of teaching are improving and having a positive effect on pupils' learning.

It was evident from our walk around school, and discussions with leaders, that as a team you have a clear picture of where teaching is stronger and where it needs to improve. You are investing a good deal in improving teaching. Appropriate time is being given to developing all teachers' understanding of how effectively marking and feedback can help pupils learn and improve their work. Senior and middle leaders, well led by the deputy headteacher, are coaching and supporting teachers according to need. They use individual action plans to target support where it is most needed to try and improve teaching as quickly as possible. You, in turn, monitor how effective their support has been by observing lessons. There is a better emphasis on the impact teaching has on pupils' learning than in the past. When leaders observe lessons they focus more on pupils' progress, although they tend not to explain clearly what pupils have actually learnt. More weight is given to the impact teaching has on pupils' learning over time, by looking at their books and using information from assessments. Rightly, you expect pupils' behaviour in class to improve as teaching does. Nevertheless, you are reviewing procedures for managing and rewarding behaviour.

Governors know what needs to improve. Minutes of recent meetings show they are asking leaders more challenging questions about pupils' achievement. Individual governors are linked with members of the leadership team to support and challenge their plans for improvement. Since the inspection governors have decided that one meeting per term will be used for discussing standards in detail, to help them evaluate improvement.

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 have been proactive in making links with local schools to learn from each other, including a headteacher who is a national leader of education. The local authority has increased the level of support it provides since the inspection. A new improvement adviser is linked to the school. It is important that she confirms exactly how she will support the school as soon as possible. This should include challenging leaders and governors to ensure the pace of improvement is quick enough.

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

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector