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Mr A Peterson
Headteacher
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Brownlow Avenue
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Dear Mr Peterson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bitterne CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 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 teaching and achievement in Key Stage 1, particularly in Year 2
- ensure that pupils in Year 3 accelerate their rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics, to make up for lost time in the infant school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with the headteacher and senior leadership team, the leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage, a representative from the local authority and members of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the

last inspection. I evaluated key documents, including the revised primary school improvement plan, local authority review reports, results of a recent parents' survey and information about pupils' results. Accompanied by the senior leadership team, I toured the school to see all classes at work and looked at examples of pupils' work in books.

Context

Since the monitoring inspection visit in April 2013, the school has been amalgamated with the infant school on the same site. Before the amalgamation, the infant school was inspected by Ofsted and judged to require special measures. The school opened as an 'all-through' primary school under your leadership in September 2014.

Main findings

You and your senior team have risen to the challenge of leading the new primary school with impressive confidence and clear direction. You have wasted no time in tackling the weaknesses in the former infant school. It is equally admirable that no momentum has been lost in improving outcomes for pupils in the former junior school, including a renewed focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs.

It is patently clear that the confidence of the senior leadership team has grown since the previous monitoring visit. You have wisely made it a priority to build a strong team and increase levels of communication among staff and with parents. You have reinforced the core values of the school, particularly trust, in boosting staff morale and ensuring that there are common approaches to working throughout the school.

You and your senior team visit classrooms to check on teaching frequently. You make the most of every opportunity to challenge staff to improve, praise effective teaching and raise expectations. Teachers and teaching assistants expect pupils' work in books to be scrutinised and to receive constructive feedback about their teaching and support for pupils. You provide regular updates on what you see in classes, which has instilled a sharper focus on pupils' learning and increased the pace of improvement. Underperformance is not acceptable.

Parents, staff and pupils are pleased with the change to an all-through primary school. Your recent parental survey includes positive comments about the improved quality of communication and how they value your leadership and relationships with their children's teachers. You have also made some practical changes to the layout and use of the school buildings in order to create a sense of a united school.

You are justifiably proud of the 2014 end of Key Stage 2 results, which show significant improvement and are now in line with or above national figures. These

results clearly validate the improvements in teachers' planning, marking and assessment since the section 5 inspection. You have correctly identified that further work needs to be done to improve the progress of pupils with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils and have rightly made this a key focus in teachers' planning and every pupil progress meeting.

The new leader for the early years has brought a fresh and dynamic approach to the provision for the youngest pupils. With support and guidance from the senior team and the local authority advisor, she has completely overhauled lesson planning, tidied and organised the classroom and outdoor areas, ensured that children's progress is assessed frequently and that they are set ambitious targets. An appropriate focus on writing has led to more rapid progress. During the monitoring inspection, children were observed enthusiastically writing Christmas cards, focusing well on forming their letters accurately and taking care with their spelling. Children's 'learning journey' books, clearly demonstrate their improving progress and that they are being assessed accurately and regularly. Helpful visual target-setting with photographs of the children is displayed around the classrooms, showing clearly where children are in their reading and writing and what their next steps are.

During the monitoring inspection it was evident that joint planning for the two Year 1 classes is leading to increased stability and higher expectations. Pupils' work shows the impact of teachers' constructive marking and use of appealing materials to stimulate pupils' interest in their work. Better marking and feedback is beginning to make a positive difference to pupils' progress throughout Key Stage 1 and ties in well with the whole-school approach to marking that you successfully established in the predecessor junior school.

You have accurately identified that teaching in Years 2 and 4 is not consistently effective and have taken steps to improve it. You also have rightly focused on accelerating progress in reading, writing and mathematics for current Year 3 pupils, so that they catch up on lost time.

Governors have also gained confidence and clearer direction since the previous monitoring visit. The amalgamation of the two schools has raised their expectations and increased their sense of ambition. They have restructured their committees and ensured that there is a wide range of expertise on the Governing Body, including members with experience of governing the infant school. Governors have seized upon opportunities for further training and development, particularly in their understanding of pupil progress data. Governors' deeper understanding now drives more challenging and searching questions for school leaders, particularly with regard to outcomes in Key Stage 1. Links with subject leaders have increased governors' understanding of the day-to-day work of the school and helped to forge productive relationships.

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

Since the previous monitoring inspection visit, the local authority has continued to provide a high level of support for both the predecessor schools and the amalgamated primary school. An interim headteacher was appointed by the local authority to lead the infant school and worked closely and effectively with you in preparing for the amalgamation. The local authority commissioned independent reviews of the school's work, which provided useful points for improvement. The school has also benefited from specific guidance with improving provision in the early years and how to improve outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Southampton and the Diocese of Winchester.

Yours sincerely

Janet Pearce

Her Majesty's Inspector