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26 January 2015

Mrs Anna Ballance  
Headteacher  
Southwold County Primary School  
Holm Way  
Bicester  
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Dear Mrs Ballance

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southwold County Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 26 January 2015, 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 October 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- bring together different school improvement plans so governors, local authority representatives and school leaders can all evaluate the impact of their actions against the same measurable outcomes for pupils.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, other leaders and a representative from Oxfordshire local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's raising achievement plans and middle

leader action plans. In addition, I scrutinised other school documentation including records of leaders' monitoring activity. The single central record was checked. I joined you on a tour of the school and visited every class, taking the opportunity to look at pupils' work.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection there have been no changes to staffing. The deputy headteacher is currently absent.

The governing body reconstituted in December 2014. As a result, there are several new governors, including a parent governor and two co-opted local authority representatives. A review of governance is underway. The governing body intends to explore the possibilities of becoming an academy although this is at a very early stage. There are no firm intentions to convert.

## **Main findings**

You are working diligently and methodically to bring about necessary improvements. At the end of the last academic year, but prior to the previous inspection, a number of experienced teaching staff left. Many staff are relatively new to the school. You have ensured that staff are clear about your expectations and are working together more effectively to improve teaching and learning. The significant turnover of teaching staff has galvanised everyone's efforts to improve, and staff are willing to learn and act on advice. Middle leaders and teachers are all committed to playing their part in helping the school to improve. As one teacher noted, 'We can now discuss more freely the things that will help us to improve. We all see ourselves as learners.'

Teaching is improving. Teachers are making sure that work is well-matched to pupils' differing needs and abilities. Changes have been made to how pupils are grouped for mathematics in Years 5 and 6. There is a greater emphasis, on using age appropriate resources to support pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts or their mastery of certain skills. As a result, pupils in Years 5 and 6 were developing a secure sense of place value and were able to get to grips with new methods of calculation accurately.

Leaders' checks on learning are more stringent and teachers are clearer about what is expected. For example, in every classroom teachers display key elements of the marking and feedback policy prominently. Consequently, even the youngest pupils are able to confidently explain the different codes used and how they make improvements to their work, using the popular, new 'fix-it pens.' The inspector saw this used to good effect in a writing lesson, during which pupils in Year 2 were able to improve their sentences by using a variety of prepositions. In mathematics, teachers are providing helpful feedback to pupils and identifying misconceptions

earlier. Pupils are beginning to respond and take greater ownership for improving their own learning. Just on occasion, pupils would benefit from additional time and support, to explore their misunderstandings further and learn from their mistakes.

Standards in writing are improving. Pupils engage more readily in dialogue and spend more time discussing their work with adults. During a tour of the school, some pupils were thrilled when their teacher commended them on using simile in their writing. The children in a Reception class were retelling a familiar story about dinosaurs animatedly and developing their vocabulary well. Teachers now place a greater importance on pupils successfully using their story telling vocabulary in their written work.

Senior leaders provide regular, helpful guidance to teachers. Alongside this, frequent meetings take place to scrutinise and discuss pupils' progress in some detail. Teachers and leaders are quick to identify any barriers to learning which pupils may experience and consider how staff can overcome these. Pupils have also had useful conversations with senior staff to discuss what helps them learn best. All of these activities are contributing to pupils making better progress than in the past.

Middle leaders have received useful training and are now much clearer about their roles and responsibilities. Their checks on the quality of learning in their subjects are carried out more regularly and skilfully. Leaders have produced a set of very detailed plans. However, the plans are difficult to follow because there are different versions for different audiences. It would be useful to bring all the plans together into one clearer, more succinct document. This will ensure that leaders and governors are able to evaluate, more clearly, the impact of actions on improving teaching and learning.

The governing body is determined to make a difference to improving the school. To that end, governors have reorganised how they work and clarified their roles and responsibilities. The Chair is receiving useful mentoring support from St. Blaise School and Cooper School, both in Oxfordshire. Governors have recently conducted an audit of their skills. As a result, they have aligned themselves suitably to areas of work where they can make the greatest impact. Governors have introduced a termly newsletter and are holding meetings with staff and parents. As a result, they are gathering first-hand the views of different groups which is contributing to a more detailed evaluation of how well the school is performing.

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 helpful support and knows the school well. A task force meet monthly with the headteacher and Chair of Governors to discuss how

well pupils are learning. These meetings are particularly helpful because local authority officers alert school leaders if any groups of pupils are falling behind, either in particular subjects or year groups. How well pupils are learning is at the heart of all discussions. Consequently, officers offer appropriate support and robust challenge, in equal measure, to school leaders which is contributing to the school improving quickly.

Leaders have found recent local authority training events, including a mathematics conference, helpful and stimulating. Useful training for middle leaders has included support with monitoring their subjects. Middle leaders are developing their skills and expertise well.

The local authority has brokered useful support for governors. A helpful review of governance is underway. Governors plan to use the findings to develop their expertise further.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr

**Her Majesty's Inspector**