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Mr Simon Atherton
Headteacher
Willowbank Primary School
Manitoba Gardens
Cullompton
Devon
EX15 1EZ

Dear Mr Atherton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Willowbank Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 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 November 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:

- strengthen the school improvement plan by recording which governors are responsible for evaluating the impact of each action taken to improve the school and how and when this will take place.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, your middle leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I undertook a 'learning walk' of the school to check the impact of actions being taken to improve the school. I looked at English and mathematics books from

each year group and teachers' planning. I also scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's records of the outcomes of monitoring activities undertaken by middle leaders. I checked the single central record and the report of your recent safeguarding audit. I evaluated the school improvement plan and spoke with a group of pupils to seek their views on recent improvements.

Context

One member of staff has returned from maternity leave. The assistant headteacher, who is on secondment from a local school, is leading Key Stage 2 and special educational needs across the school.

Main findings

You have wasted no time in setting the school on its path to be good or better at its next inspection. You are determined to improve the school at a rapid pace. All staff and governors share in your commitment and drive to deliver these improvements. Parents are supporting you in making these changes.

You have established an effective leadership team following a review of their roles and responsibilities. These leaders have taken on their new roles with great energy and enthusiasm. They are tackling inconsistencies in marking and supporting colleagues to improve their teaching by giving honest feedback. Work in English and mathematics books demonstrates pupils are responding to teachers' comments and making faster progress. Pupils say they appreciate these comments. As one pupil explained, 'teachers are challenging us and taking us up to the next level, step by step'. Leaders are increasingly holding teachers to account for improving the achievement and progress of their pupils. Consequently, their expectations for what their pupils can achieve have risen sharply.

Your mathematics subject leader is rising to the challenge of improving teaching in this subject. The school's focus on tightening up the rigour and quality of teachers' planning, assessment and monitoring systems is having a positive impact on speeding attainment and progress. Staff know in detail how well their pupils are achieving. This is because they are frequently checking pupils' progress. Teachers then plan work to ensure all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, learn and make good progress. These improved systems have raised teachers' expectations. As a result, the quality and quantity of work in pupils' books has increased. Teachers are challenging pupils to achieve higher standards. In discussions, pupils are clear this is helping them learn more effectively.

You have acted swiftly to strengthen the achievement in writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Your Foundation Stage leader is working with the local authority consultant, to improve children's writing skills. The children have a range of well-planned opportunities in the classroom and in their outdoor provision to develop

these writing skills. Following training, teaching assistants are making a positive contribution to extending children's thinking and learning. Most children are now on track to make good progress and achieve higher standards than those found nationally at the end of Reception.

Governors have implemented a range of strategies to improve the effectiveness of their work following the review of governance. Firstly, they have appointed a new clerk to governors. This is strengthening the school's capacity to move forward. For example, minutes record the increasingly challenging questions governors are asking leaders. Governors are checking the progress of the actions taken to improve the school for themselves. They are now setting out their expectations. Teachers are therefore clear about the level of information expected from them to enable governors to check on the performance of the school. However, the school improvement plan does not yet set out exactly who, when and how governors will check leaders' actions in order to bring about the rapid improvement needed.

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 for this school. Following the inspection, they carried out an external review of the school's safeguarding procedures. This confirmed the school's arrangements are secure. Specific support to improve teaching in the Foundation Stage is being effective. Currently, the local authority is supporting the school in establishing partnerships with a local teaching school to improve teachers' practice even further. School leaders welcome these links to ensure the school improves quickly.

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

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector