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Jacqueline Lapsa
Vernon Terrace Primary School
Vernon Terrace
Northampton
NN1 5HE

Dear Mrs Lapsa

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Vernon Terrace Primary School

Following my visit to your school 9 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 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:

- Establish more rigorous systems for the regular monitoring of teaching and learning so that areas for improvement are followed up promptly and effectively.
- Ensure that planning for different groups, including the most-able, is a consistent feature of all lessons so that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Ensure that the external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is undertaken very soon.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, two assistant headteachers who share responsibilities for literacy, two teachers who share responsibility for numeracy, the

designated senior person for safeguarding, the special educational needs coordinator, four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority. In all meetings we discussed the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school development plan and progress report. I looked at a range of other documentation including monitoring records and the draft review of governance. I also looked at a sample of exercise books. I accompanied you on a tour of the school to see the learning that was taking place. I had brief informal conversations with pupils.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a new teacher to the nursery class. She took up her post in October.

Main findings

Your school improvement plan addresses specifically the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. Appropriate targets relating to pupil achievement are clear and reflect raised expectations for the achievement of all pupils. Targets that are not related directly to achievement are less specific and are not linked with measurable success criteria. You and your team regularly review the progress made by the school. However there is no indication on the plan that revisions have been made when targets have been missed. Where review points have been termly, interim check-ups would have enabled school leaders to recognise the risk of a target not being achieved and act accordingly. This is particularly true in respect of teaching, when some areas for development have not been followed up promptly and effectively to enable progress to be made more rapidly

You have considered carefully the ways in which information about pupils' achievement is recorded and analysed and have introduced a new data system that is accessible to all teaching staff and governors. Teachers record the results of pupils' assessments on the system every half-term, giving them and the leadership team a better overview of how pupils are doing. Subject leaders are growing in confidence in their analysis of this data. This enables them to identify promptly those individuals and groups of pupils who are underachieving. Pupils are then provided with additional support in areas in which they need more help.

You have appropriately high expectations for the progress to be made by pupils in the school. Progress review meetings take place termly. These are attended by the class teachers, members of the leadership team and special educational needs coordinator. They review the impact of interventions put in place so that next steps for each pupil have a clear focus on ensuring that the pupil makes at least expected progress.

Assessment data is used by teachers to inform their lesson planning. For example, the numeracy coordinators identify specific skills individual pupils need to develop in

order to reach the next sub-level. These are addressed in lessons as well as by the "Rockets" intervention group that meets for an hour after school. This is well-attended by pupils who need further practice in key areas of numeracy. You have ensured that teachers understand that they should plan lessons that meet the needs of all pupils. You have produced a planning checklist with clear expectations for all teachers to address the school's key areas for improvement in all lessons. These include, for example, opportunities for extended writing, high expectations for presentation, differentiation for groups of pupils and the use of questioning to develop and extend pupils' learning. There is no explicit reference to the planning for the most-able and challenge for all pupils in the checklist or in planning records. As a consequence there is too much variation in levels of challenge and planning for the most-able across the school. A summary of evaluations of lesson observations completed by subject leaders confirms this.

Subject coordinators, including the joint numeracy co-ordinators and the joint literacy coordinators who are assistant headteachers, have responded well to their increased responsibilities. They have introduced new systems and reviewed existing policies, reflecting the areas for improvement. You have regular and more focussed staff meetings which provide the opportunities for subject leaders to train staff and evaluate the impact of new systems in place.

You have introduced a structured review of the work pupils have completed in their exercise books. You have set up a coaching system. This involves teachers working with partners to review each other's marking and to share good practice and planning ideas. This initiative is boosting levels of consistency in marking across the school and promoting a collective response to addressing key areas for improvement. In some cases however, feedback from coordinators and colleagues lacks detail on the levels of challenge and extension seen in exercise books.

Subject coordinators have rightly raised expectations for the standards of hand-writing and planning for groups of students, including the most-able. There is clear evidence of progress in hand-writing. Your literacy co-ordinators have launched a new hand-writing policy. They have introduced schemes to boost the frequency and quality of extended writing across different stages. Presentation in exercise books looked at during this inspection was neat. Pupils take pride in their work.

You carry out formal lesson observations every term. You combine this with work scrutiny and conversations with pupils to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This is helpful.

Members of the leadership team and subject coordinators are monitoring the quality of teaching and learning more regularly and less formally through learning walks. Subject co-ordinators review the marking of books in the subject areas for which they are responsible. They provide verbal feedback to teachers following a visit to their lessons. This is not formally recorded and systems are not in place to follow up the response to feedback received. They are able to recognise and celebrate good

practice. However, there are not clear lines of accountability and rigorous follow-up in addressing areas for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

The review of governance took place early in January. The final report is due soon following amendments to the draft review. The governors have responded promptly to this and to the most recent inspection report. They recognise the need to broaden the level of expertise represented across the governing body. As a consequence, they have recruited two new members with professional experience in education. In addition they have recruited a new parent governor.

Governors are aware of the key priorities for the school. They currently lack sufficient knowledge and understanding to provide the appropriate level of support and challenge for you and the leadership team. You provide them with detailed information and have given them some training. They recognise the need to be more involved in review and monitoring on a more formal basis as detailed in the improvement plan. They are pursuing further training in order to place them in a more informed position to carry out their responsibilities and to be less reliant on you.

The external review of the school's use of pupil premium has not taken place. This should be arranged as a matter of urgency.

External support

The local authority has provided feedback on your development plan. A representative of the local authority met with you soon after the last inspection.

Members of the leadership team make regular use of their links with the cluster of local schools. They receive valuable support and training, both in specific subject areas and in their leadership development.

Newly appointed and experienced governors are making increasing use of governor training offered by the local authority.

You have forged links with several experienced educational professionals and organisations to support areas such as leadership development, data analysis, moderation of the quality of teaching and learning and the provision for pupils who speak an additional language.

The leadership team, the Governing Body and the local authority recognise the need for a collaborative approach to addressing successfully the priorities for the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector