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Mrs L Howlett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Howlett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Nunney First School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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.

This second visit was to evaluate the progress the school has made since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- establish close links with a good or better school in order to commission interim English leadership to cover staff absence
- check the quality of teaching rigorously and report the findings to the governing body
- implement effective systems for governors to garner a clear and accurate view of the school's work and use the information to hold the school's leaders to account
- train members of the governing body to manage the performance of the headteacher in line with government requirements
- use RAISEonline reports to evaluate how well pupils achieve over time and to compare their achievement with pupils in other schools.

Evidence

The visit focused on the teaching of writing and leaders' efforts to help colleagues to improve their teaching. However, no substantive class teachers were present during the inspection due to staff absence. I shared the training materials from Ofsted's Better English events and the findings of Ofsted's most recent English survey reports with you.

During the inspection, I met with pupils, governors and a Local Leader of Education who is supporting the school to discuss the action taken since my first visit. A few days earlier, I held a telephone discussion with a senior officer from the local authority. I met with you throughout the day and together we observed the teaching of writing in each classroom and looked at pupils' written work in books. I evaluated the school's development plan and scrutinised other documents including data on pupils' attainment and the progress they make.

Context

The number of pupils on roll has fallen by around one third. Pupils have been taught in two mixed-age classes since September.

There have been many changes in staffing and governance since the last section 5 inspection. In June 2013, a part-time teacher was absent long-term and resigned in April 2014. The following June, a full-time teacher was absent long-term before resigning last December. Additionally, several supply teachers have been employed to cover staff absence and to job-share with you. During this time, you increased your teaching commitment and took on leadership responsibilities for mathematics and assessment. The subject leader for English will take maternity leave shortly. In recent months, there have been three Chairs of the governing body and four governors have left. The new Chair and three governors have been in post since January 2015.

Main findings

The instability, in staffing and at governor level, has occupied much of your attention at the expense of securing better achievement, particularly in writing. You now recognise that you have not spent enough time working with colleagues in lessons to make sure that teaching and pupils' achievement are on track to be good before the next inspection. While staff that have joined the school recently contribute to the leadership of the early years and special educational needs, the lack of capacity to drive up standards in English when the subject leader starts maternity leave is a concern. I recommend that you seek assistance from a good or better school to provide leadership in English when the current post holder starts maternity leave.

Standards in writing are not improving swiftly enough. In Years 1 to 4, pupils' achievement in writing still lags markedly behind the other subjects. The written

work of the most able pupils in Year 2 does not show a good enough grasp of more advanced composition skills so there is a lot more to do to ensure that this group of pupils achieve well over time. The English subject leader has extended the teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics) into Key Stage 2. Pupils in this class have become more proficient at using these important skills to sound out unfamiliar words. Teachers give extra attention to teaching handwriting skills and it is noticeable that pupils take more care with their handwriting in lessons. Nevertheless, not enough pupils use a cursive style and an inappropriate pencil grip often goes unchallenged. Teachers' marking in books shows pupils how to improve their work, but teachers do not follow up on spelling errors rigorously enough. The new data tracking system has enabled teachers to identify individual pupils at risk of falling behind. In Year 2, pupils are more productive with their writing and benefit from extra help each day with reading and writing. Rightly, pupils recognise that the one-to-one support has improved their confidence when reading and made it easier to complete tasks in other subjects.

The recently appointed Chair of Governors has been astute in recruiting new governors, but successive changes in personnel have weakened the governing body's oversight of the school. For too long, governors have not checked the school's performance thoroughly and compared it with other schools. The governing body does not have a programme of checks in place for governors to check the work of school leaders in order to hold them to account. In the past, the arrangements to manage your performance have not been robust enough. Consequently, there is an urgent need to train governors so the government's requirements for this important aspect of the governing body's work.

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 appropriate support, but visits to check how well the school is doing were interrupted while a new school improvement partner was sought. During this time, a senior officer maintained contact with the school, but the new support was not brokered quickly enough to prevent the school's progress from slipping.

Training commissioned through the local authority has improved teachers' written feedback to pupils. As a result, pupils have a better understanding of how to improve their writing, but are less clear about the need to correct spelling errors. The English subject leader, supported by an independent consultant, has set out the knowledge and skills that pupils will learn in each year group. The new programmes that are studied have helped teachers to accommodate the wider age range of the new classes.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector