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Mrs D Bailey
Headteacher
Laira Green Primary School
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Dear Mrs Bailey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Laira Green Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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. 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:

- ensure pupils make good progress across Key Stage 2, especially in reading, by:
 - extending pupils' skills in language and in understanding a wide range of texts
 - making sure that all teachers constantly check pupils' understanding and adapt their lessons, especially in the mixed-age classes, so that all pupils are challenged to make good progress
 - ensuring teachers' marking consistently helps pupils to know how to improve their work

- add relevant and measurable 'milestones' to the school's action plan to help governors to check that the school is on track to make the required improvements within the timescale.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy head, a group of pupils, the special educational needs co-ordinator and leaders of the Foundation Stage, English and mathematics, the Chair of Governors, an adviser from the local authority and a local leader of education to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's action plan was evaluated and information on pupils' progress examined. In addition, the inspector and headteacher together visited all classrooms and looked at pupils' books.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, a new Chair of Governors has been appointed. The deputy head and mathematics subject leader have both returned from maternity leave. The English subject leader has gone on maternity leave and the school has made suitable arrangements for her role to be covered in the interim period.

Main findings

The headteacher and deputy head are analysing the progress of individuals and groups of pupils in detail every six weeks. The information indicates that, when pupils start in the reception class their communication and language skills are weaker than is typical for their age. They make good progress and catch up with other children by the time they enter Key Stage 1. This is because the Foundation Stage leader has high expectations of the children and ensures that good attention is given to developing their speaking and listening and reading skills. Teachers in the Early Years Foundation Stage constantly assess the children's progress and use the information to adapt the lessons to the children's different learning needs. This good practice of adapting teaching to best meet children's needs is not yet consistent across the school.

In Year 1, pupils' attainment in phonics (the sounds that letters make) is above other pupils nationally. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils' achievement is broadly in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's data indicate that achievement is improving for pupils currently in Key Stage 2, in line with national expectations, although their progress in reading is still lagging behind their progress in writing and mathematics.

The English subject leader has rightly identified the need to extend pupils' understanding of the books they read, especially the disadvantaged pupils who are

eligible for support through the pupil premium. Pupils' limited vocabulary and lack of experience of complex sentences are often barriers to their comprehension. Appropriate strategies are being put into place to improve pupils' reading in Key Stage 2. The strategies include a new reading scheme, lessons in phonics, early morning reading sessions, reading a book together as a class and guided group reading lessons. The subject leader is also rightly developing more opportunities for pupils to write at greater length. Teachers give good emphasis to developing pupils' use of grammar and punctuation. Spelling and handwriting are weaker.

The mathematics subject leader accurately monitors and evaluates the quality of teaching and learning in the subject through lesson observations, checking pupils' work and teachers' planning, discussions with pupils and analysing information on their progress. She rightly holds teachers to account for the progress pupils make and provides appropriate training and support for them. She has suitable plans to work with the local authority mathematics adviser and the local leader of education's school to develop teachers' skills in providing more opportunities for problem solving.

The special educational needs co-ordinator also carries out a wide range of monitoring and evaluation to ensure pupils who need support are identified early and suitable provision is made for them. Teaching assistants support pupils who need extra help effectively in lessons and the pupils progress as well as their peers.

A positive environment for learning, including displays of pupils' work and a range of resources, plus clear expectations of what is to be learned, contribute to pupils' good engagement in lessons. Pupils make most progress in lessons that challenge them all to think at a higher level and to extend their responses. For example, in a philosophy lesson in a mixed class of Year 4 and 5 pupils, the teacher's probing questions led the pupils to explain in detail their views on the use of horses in battle during the First World War. The teacher adjusted her questions and the activities skilfully for the different groups, according to how well and quickly they understood the ideas. Not all teachers are adjusting the expectations, questions, activities and pace enough during lessons to sustain good progress for all pupils, especially in the mixed-age classes. The headteacher has rightly arranged training to help staff in this.

Pupils' work is marked regularly. However, not all teachers are writing comments that help pupils to know what to do to improve their work. Some good examples of marking were seen in English in the mixed Year 5 and 6 classes. The pupils responded well to the teachers' comments.

A group of the most able pupils in Year 6 is being challenged to work towards the higher level 6 in mathematics. The teachers are being supported in this by a teacher

from the local secondary school. Across the school, the more able pupils are not yet reaching the levels they should.

Pupils continue to demonstrate good attitudes to learning, especially when the work stretches them. They behave well in lessons and around the school. A lunchtime club and lots of activities ensure pupils enjoy their lunch and play times. Pupils value the many trips the school organises for them. Pupils say they feel safe in school. They are taught how to keep safe, for example through lessons on internet safety and how to deal with bullying. They say there is little bullying in the school and that teachers would address any concerns they may have. The school has appointed a leader for safeguarding and this area of work is carried out thoroughly.

Following its review, the Governing Body is being restructured appropriately. It is moving to a model of full Governing Body meetings nine times a year. This is in order to ensure that aspects such as the curriculum and standards are the responsibility of all governors. Governors have attended suitable training on interpreting attainment and progress data. The training enables them to ask more challenging questions when holding senior leaders to account for the progress pupils make. In addition, governors visit the school and see for themselves the progress being made. The action plan covers all the areas identified for improvement in the section 5 inspection. However, without measurable 'milestones' it is difficult to see how the governors will evaluate the progress being made.

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 brokered appropriate support from a local leader of education through the teaching school. It is also providing suitable support for mathematics and assessment, and for the review of the Governing Body. The support is recent and has not yet had an impact on pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater
Her Majesty's Inspector