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13 March 2015

Ms K Salter
The Headteacher
Whitley Park Primary and Nursery School
Brixham Road
Reading
RG2 7RB

Dear Ms Karen Salter

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Whitley Park Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in December 2013. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of serious weaknesses designation.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Reading.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in December 2013

- Improve pupils' achievement, especially in writing and mathematics, by ensuring that teaching is consistently good or better. This should be done by:
 - matching work in lessons to pupils' abilities, in particular making sure that work is hard enough for the most able pupils
 - ensuring that the pace of learning is brisk
 - using questioning targeted at individual pupils to ensure that any who are not engaged become fully focused on their work
 - giving pupils adequate opportunities to make improvements to their work after it has been marked
 - using the meetings about pupils' progress to identify pupils' learning needs, and closely target support for them.
- Develop the school's middle leadership by:
 - ensuring that year group and subject leaders fully understand the school's data and can use them to drive improvements in achievement and teaching
 - taking greater responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and supporting colleagues to develop best practice.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 12 March 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, pupils, Key Stage 2 staff, the year team leaders and subject leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. The inspector observed teaching in the Nursery classes, Reception classes, Year 1, Year 2, Year 5 and Year 6. Parents shared their views of the school with the inspector informally at the start of the day. During this inspection, the inspector focused on the impact of middle leaders on improvements in teaching and achievement. Subject and year team leaders were observed conducting a book scrutiny and giving feedback to class teachers after lesson observations.

Context

Threenewly qualified teachers joined the school in September 2014. A family support worker also joined the school in September 2014.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher's drive, ambition, and consistently high expectations are shared by the staff. As a result, from the youngest upwards, pupils are keen to achieve and value academic endeavour. The headteacher has developed the skills of subject and year team leaders effectively. They now play an important role in securing improvements in the areas for which they are responsible. They also ensure that whole school approaches to teaching are consistently employed. As a result, pupils are now achieving more highly, and predictions for 2015 indicate there will be further improvements. The headteacher has rigorously evaluated the results from 2014 Key Stages 1 and 2 assessments and tests. She has rightly identified that further improvement is needed to ensure that pupils eligible for additional funding achieve as well as other pupils nationally.

At the time of the previous visit, the leadership of numeracy was not as strong as literacy. Now the leadership of numeracy is more effective. As a result, there have been improvements in the way teachers plan numeracy lessons. Activities now enable pupils to develop their mathematical reasoning skills and apply their numerical understanding to real-life problems. There is a high level of challenge for pupils because the subject leader has effectively shared good practice. As a result, pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved in both Key Stages 1 and 2.

The literacy leader has also made significant improvements to the teaching of reading and writing. Of particular note is the quality of the comments pupils make when they pair up to mark each other's writing. These comments identify what writing techniques have been employed and their effect on the reader using the correct terminology. Pupils also correct words spelt incorrectly as part of a whole-school focus on improving spelling. Pupils' comments are high quality because they

are modelled on the detailed comments teachers make when they mark pupils' drafts or 'cold writing tasks'. As a result, pupils' attainment in writing has improved. Pupils commented to the inspector that they enjoy writing. They understand that being able to write effectively will help them succeed in the future and are motivated to try harder because of this.

Governors have made a significant contribution to ensuring the school moves forward at a brisk pace. Governors know the school well because they carefully scrutinise information on pupils' achievement. They make effective use of it to hold leaders to account. To ensure governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, subject and year team leaders report to the governing body on the impact of their work. Governors attend pupil progress meetings. They are consequently better able to identify precisely what the school needs to do to improve further and monitor that it is being done quickly enough.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Subject and year team leaders visit lessons regularly and scrutinise pupils' books to evaluate the quality of teaching. They analyse strengths and weaknesses well. When they identify weaker practice, they provide teachers with effective guidance and support.
- Subject and team leaders analyse the results of their monitoring carefully. They use this to make adjustments to whole school approaches and alter the work they have planned for pupils.
- The leader responsible for early years and Reception uses her expert knowledge to good effect to plan improvements with the large team of teachers and assistants who work in these areas. These include significant changes to the environment to ensure that every area of the nursery is focused on learning, including the outside play area.
- Teachers are providing pupils with time to complete the follow-up tasks they set and respond to the questions they pose at the end of marked work.
- Activities are better matched to the abilities of pupils. Joint planning sessions led by year team leaders allow teachers to share ideas that help them plan tasks to challenge all pupils.
- Leaders' support for pupils who are falling behind in literacy and numeracy is effectively tailored to meet their individual needs. At pupil progress meetings, year team leaders and teachers use data from assessments of pupils' work to evaluate the impact of the extra help they provide. If pupils need a wider range of support in order to catch up, their additional needs are well catered for, including accessing counselling and speech and language therapy.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2 do not always plan the deployment of teaching assistants in lessons carefully enough. Some teaching assistants are not making enough use of targeted questioning to ensure the pupils they support are fully engaged in their learning.
- In a minority of Key Stage 1 lessons, the pace of learning is too slow. This is sometimes because teachers do not plan activities that require pupils to work hard in order to complete them. Occasionally tasks set are too challenging so pupils do not attempt them. In both cases, some pupils become disruptive as a result of not being busy enough.
- Some teachers set follow-up tasks and pose questions at the end of marked work that do not challenge pupils to think hard enough. Consequently, their learning is not extended through these questions and tasks.
- Subject and year team leaders do not always use their checks on teaching and information about pupils' achievement to hold teachers robustly to account.

External support

The headteacher has carefully ensured external support is focused on improving pupils' achievement. The local authority has supported the school through its regular monitoring visits. These visits have enabled the local authority's partnership adviser to check the accuracy of the school's evaluation and provide the school with an external view of the progress it is making. Following these visits, the local authority has provided tailor-made support in numeracy and literacy, as well as training for governors. The headteacher has made effective use of experts who have a national profile to train the staff in whole school approaches to writing. As a result of the headteacher's astute deployment of a range of external support, the school has made significant improvements. Consequently, the local authority is now sending other schools to visit this school to see good practice, for example in marking and early years provision.