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20 March 2015

Annelore Kentish
Kensworth VC Lower School
Common Road
Kensworth
Dunstable
LU6 3RH

Dear Mrs Kentish

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Kensworth VC Lower School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 December 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:

- Improve consistency in the quality of provision across the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Sharpen systems for monitoring the school's progress towards the actions set out in the improvement plan.
- Ensure that all staff understand the important part they play in promoting good learning to move the school to good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, subject leaders, four governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the school's latest data on pupils' achievement was scrutinised. You took me on a short guided tour of the school visiting all classes.

Context

Since the previous inspection the leader of literacy and early years provision and one other teacher have returned from maternity leave. Subject leadership for mathematics has been taken on permanently by the Year 5 teacher.

Main findings

A strong desire and ambition to move the school to good was evident in all discussions with you, key subject leaders and governors. Staff morale is high and most (but not all) staff are 'going the extra mile' to make the necessary improvements. Actions in the school improvement plan are generally fit for purpose. Even so, it is not always clear who is responsible for leading each action. Timescales for checking progress are too broad to achieve the necessary changes in the shortest possible time and to avoid slippage. It will be important for every member of staff to understand where they are making a contribution in reaching the goal of getting to good and beyond.

Changes in approaches to the leadership of literacy, early years and mathematics are making a difference. Training for these leaders has improved their confidence, skills and effectiveness in monitoring their subjects and areas of responsibility. They are fired up and driving improvement forward enthusiastically. The leaders are taking an active part in checking the quality of teaching and learning because you have begun to share responsibility for this important work with them. In doing so, you are building capacity within the school to monitor and accurately evaluate strengths and weakness. For example, the literacy leader knows what needs to be done to develop writing across the school. Already there are visible signs of improvement evident in the written work on display. A new approach in teaching mathematics, introduced by the subject leader, has raised teachers' expectations for what pupils are capable of achieving, especially the most able pupils.

The quality of provision across the early years is too variable. You, and the early years leader, have made clear your expectations and you have involved advisers or consultants to provide an external view. In pre-school, however, the rate of improvement is too slow with the quality of provision markedly weaker than in the Reception class.

The governing body took up the local authority's offer of an external review of governance and it has acted upon the recommendations. Governors have a better understanding of what it is to be a 'critical friend'. They remain loyal supporters of the school but know that they have an important role in holding school leaders to account. Governors describe their approach as 'more business-like' than previously. For example, they are not reliant solely on the headteacher's information about pupils' achievement because they are confident in analysing and interpreting data. This places them in a strong position to ask searching questions about pupils' progress and attainment. In addition, they are keeping track of the achievement of disadvantaged pupils supported through the government's pupil premium funding. They gather evidence of the impact of the sports premium funding to ensure an increase in pupils' participation in a range of sports. Communication with parents has improved especially by introducing a page on a social networking site to give important messages and notices. There is more work to do to find fresh ways of keeping parents on board when established methods are not working.

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 commissions useful support for the school that reflects and meets the school's needs. It has brokered a National Leader in Education (NLE) to support you with your school improvement work. Several staff have benefited from access to courses run by the local authority to develop their teaching and leadership skills.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire and the Diocese of St Albans.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools