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Saskia Martin
Senior Teacher
Shelton Lower School
Lower Shelton Road
Marston Moretaine
Bedfordshire
MK43 0LS

Dear Ms Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Shelton Lower School

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. Plans are closely aligned to the areas identified in the last inspection but they are not being implemented effectively to bring about improvement rapidly. The school should take immediate action to:

- Strengthen leadership and management to build the school's capacity to make the necessary changes.
- Implement the existing plan for improvement and keep to the dates set for the completion of actions.
- Ensure that rigour in monitoring the school's progress towards the actions set out in the plan is sustained.

- Respond to outcomes of monitoring and revise the planned actions accordingly taking changes in staffing into account.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the literacy subject leader, five governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I looked at samples of pupils' writing in Key Stages 1 and 2, including 'wow' books, literacy books and 'topic' books where pupils write across different subjects. I visited all classes on a short tour of the school.

Context

The headteacher has been absent on long term sick leave since February. One permanent teacher has resigned and is leaving at the end of term. Governors have arranged for the Key Stage 2 class to be taught next term by two teachers; one teaching every morning and one afternoon and the other covering four afternoons. This is a temporary arrangement until a permanent full time teacher is appointed.

Main findings

The school has devised a suitable improvement plan to address weaknesses identified in the last inspection. The headteacher took contributions from staff, governors and the local authority in drafting the initial plan which focuses clearly on improving pupils' achievement. Targets to raise standards of attainment are suitably challenging especially for the most able pupils. Even so, there is already slippage in implementing the plan. In the absence of the headteacher, other school leaders have continued to monitor the subjects for which they are accountable. They are not evaluating the information in sufficient detail to inform the school of what is working well and where revision of the planned actions is needed. The impact of new approaches for writing, for example, is obvious in Key Stage 1 but not in Key Stage 2. Similarly inconsistencies are evident in the quality of teachers' marking. The improvement plan has not been revised to take account the temporary arrangements for the Key Stage 2 class during the summer term. The deadline has not been met to update the school's website.

The school has adopted a new electronic system to keep track of the progress that all pupils are making. This is a positive move in helping staff to move away from the previous National Curriculum levels of attainment. They are now making judgements about pupils' attainment in relation to the statutory requirements for each year group. Action has been taken to accelerate the progress of pupils who have been identified as underachieving. Leaders of literacy and mathematics have also identified where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge to fill to enable them to meet the new curriculum requirements.

The governing body has sound systems and procedures in place to ensure that it keeps abreast of improvements in the school's work. These have previously worked well. An external review of governance has been completed and the governing body is addressing the agreed areas of development that came out of it. Until February, governors have received a comprehensive evaluation of the school's progress in a report. However, the rigour of monitoring and evaluation has diminished and consequently, there is some slippage in targets set in the improvement plan. Governors are confident in challenging leaders about the achievement of individuals and groups of pupils. They have identified some pupils in Year 4 who have not made enough progress and have taken action to increase provision for booster classes to accelerate their progress. The governing body is in the early stages of planning ahead for a replacement teacher for Key Stage 2. Options have not yet been fully considered and agreed. It will be important for all staff to press on with the 'getting to good' agenda and for governors to ensure that the pace of change is sustained while temporary staffing arrangements are in place.

Staff benefit from opportunities to work closely with colleagues across the hard federation with Southill Lower School to share ideas, moderate work and participate in joint training sessions.

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 increased its support since the school was judged to require improvement. Visits from advisers have been timely and the school has benefited from advisory input into the school improvement plan. The local authority does not have access to first hand evidence of the impact of the school's improvement work on teaching and learning. Staff have benefited from access to courses commissioned by the local authority, via the Central Bedfordshire Teaching Schools, to develop their teaching and leadership skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector