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Mrs Deborah Wilson
Headteacher
Sedbergh Primary School
Long Lane
Sedbergh
Cumbria
LA10 5AL

Dear Mrs Wilson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sedbergh Primary School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 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:

- empower middle leaders further so they are able to use their initiative and be more fully involved in decision-making and in checking the quality of teaching and learning
- sharpen subject action plans so that they include clear criteria to measure the impact on students' learning
- ensure governors are clear about how they can support and challenge school leaders, especially in setting targets and checking evidence against milestones
- make sure the most able pupils deepen and extend their knowledge and skills with work that is suitably challenging.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and two governors. I also met two representatives of the local authority and the headteacher, who is a National Leader of Education (NLE), of a partnered school providing support. I spoke with a group of Year 6 pupils, visited each classroom and sampled pupils' writing. The school improvement plans, the report following the recent review of governance, monitoring reports and information about pupils' progress were evaluated.

Main findings

The Rapid Improvement Plan addresses all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. You have identified relevant actions to improve teaching and raise achievement in writing and set them within a realistic timescale. Your plans for training and coaching middle leaders and for a review of governance have progressed well. However, planning lacks detail beyond this and leadership and governance responsibilities are not yet delegated as effectively as they could be. The subject action plans are not sufficiently detailed about how middle leaders will check the impact of actions on pupils' outcomes.

Staff and governors recognise that changes are needed; they are committed to bringing about improvements and raising pupils' achievement as quickly as possible. All are keen to build an effective team and you are all rightly focusing on improving communication and exchange of information in order to do this.

You have all worked hard to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve, of their behaviour and of how they present their work. Pupils say that they are now more self-disciplined in corridors and shared areas of the school. It was clear, during my visit, that pupils are aware of their responsibilities to maintain a calm environment and to work to the best of their ability. They were attentive and cooperative in lessons and polite and considerate in shared areas. Pupils are presenting their written work with more care now that they have clear guidelines.

Teachers and teaching assistants are benefitting from visits to outstanding schools and from joint working with national and specialist leaders of education. These links are enabling them to share ideas and develop their skills in teaching and assessment. This is having a positive impact in ensuring that pupils of different ability are given work at the right level. However, there are still occasions when the most able pupils are not provided with activities that deepen and extend their knowledge and skills.

You have revised the marking policy appropriately and all staff are now providing pupils with opportunities to respond to comments. Marking is most effective in mathematics, where teachers are addressing misunderstandings so that pupils do

not have gaps in their learning. The marking of writing is not as well developed yet and rightly remains a priority for improvement. At times the marking of writing does not focus sufficiently on extending key writing skills appropriate to pupils' age and ability.

Actions to improve the teaching of writing throughout the school and across the curriculum are at early stages, but have established foundations on which to build. In the early years, the classroom and outside environments have been enriched to provide more frequent opportunities for writing in order to develop children's literacy skills. The moderation of writing across the school and the writing workshop for parents have raised the profile of writing and provided teachers with a clearer view of how writing develops across year groups. Work with a local high school, to develop the writing of the most able pupils, is progressing well. Writing across the curriculum has not yet been a whole school focus but the literacy leader is doing some useful work to trial approaches before introducing a whole school initiative at the start of the next academic year.

The improvements to teaching are starting to have an impact on pupils' achievement. The attainment of Year 6 pupils is on track to rise this year. Progress is quickening in mathematics across the school as a result of better planning and marking. However, pupils' progress in writing is still patchy, as improvements to teaching and marking are not yet fully established.

The reported areas for improvement in the school's leadership centre on developing the role of middle leaders and governors. Middle leaders have welcomed the opportunities they have had so far, to attend training and work alongside senior leaders and leaders from outstanding schools. They are keen to develop their skills further through professional development and by taking on more responsibilities in school. Middle leaders are beginning to take more responsibility for checking the quality of teaching and tracking pupils' progress. However, there needs to be more clarity about the lines of communication and extent to which middle leaders can initiate and lead improvements in teaching and learning.

Governors have also welcomed opportunities to extend their skills and they are fully committed to securing improvement. Governors have engaged in training and participated in an external review, which has given them a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas requiring further development. They have sharpened the work of committees and clerking services are much improved, so all governors are better informed. The external review has supported governors well in identifying areas of their work that require further development and the resultant action plan gives an overview of how the school's values can be promoted more successfully. However, the plan does not indicate how governors' involvement in setting targets and their role in decision-making, monitoring and evaluation will be extended. These aspects of their work still require further development.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The last inspection report noted that the local authority provided only minimal support prior to the inspection. It has now stepped up support through the establishment of a School Improvement Monitoring Group, general adviser support and by facilitating partnership working with outstanding schools and national and local leaders of education. The school is also part of the South Lakes Rural Partnership. The range of external support, especially the link with outstanding schools, is building capacity within the school to secure further improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector