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Ms Sarah Pickering
Headteacher
Mill Water School
Bicton
Budleigh Salterton
EX9 7BJ

Dear Ms Pickering

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Mill Water School

Following my visit to your school on 12 May 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 February 2015. 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:

- include more specific targets in the school's action plans to show where pupils' progress will accelerate and secure good levels of achievement
- ensure governors clarify the roles and responsibilities of the separate committees and monitor more closely the school's progress to provide greater challenge and better support
- provide governors with timely information on the progress made by different groups of pupils in different classes, to enable them to check the effectiveness of the school's actions
- develop partnerships with other special schools to share good practice in tracking pupils' progress from their starting points in Reception to the time they leave Key Stage 5.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the Governing Body. A telephone conversation took place with a local authority representative to discuss the progress made by the school since the inspection. The school action plans were evaluated. A range of documents were reviewed, including minutes of governing body meetings, information detailing pupils' progress, feedback from lesson observations, notes of visits by consultants, middle leaders' plans and professional development and the headteacher's correspondence with the local authority and the school's builders. With the headteacher, visits were completed to each classroom and we completed a short tour of the school's playgrounds and outdoor areas.

Context

The governing body has appointed the acting headteacher at the time of the inspection as the school's headteacher. The school have promoted four members of staff to middle leader positions. A new class teacher has been appointed to a part time position in the Reception and Year 1 class.

Main findings

The headteacher and senior leaders have maintained the drive for improvement since the last inspection. The school has made discernible progress in developing a calm, orderly and welcoming environment. Throughout the school, pupils of all ages display positive attitudes to their work and clearly appreciate the opportunities provided by the new school premises. Older students benefit from a purpose built area of the school that helps to develop their independence and life skills. From September, the class structure will provide a separate sixth form class that will help students to see themselves as a distinct group and help to further prepare students for transition from school. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from large classrooms and now have more opportunities to choose from a range of stimulating activities indoors and outside. Children show excitement and obvious enjoyment as they develop their levels of concentration and self-confidence.

Senior leaders continue to communicate high expectations. The school's improvement plans address the areas identified at the last inspection. Monitoring is focused on maintaining the good quality of teaching seen at the last inspection. Through both formal and informal monitoring, staff are provided with tailored levels of support, coaching and guidance. There is a clear understanding that all teachers must vary the level of challenge in lessons. Staff are making better use of information gathered through their marking and observations in lessons to raise standards.

The school's approach to planning has improved with teachers setting different activities that are more precisely matched to pupils' needs. Pupils in class 7 worked

purposefully on a range of mathematical activities that were well matched to their differing abilities. Pupils listened carefully to each other as they confidently explained the strategy they had used to solve mathematical calculations. A pupil drew diagrams to show how sets of arrays can be presented as a multiplication, whilst another group were encouraged to explain the methods they had used in subtracting two digit numbers.

The headteacher and senior leaders have acted promptly to develop the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. Middle leaders have responded well and completed audits of the quality of provision and compiled appropriate action plans to address weaker aspects. They show a clear determination to share the responsibility for driving improvement. Middle leaders' plans describe the actions that will be taken, but do not clearly set out the difference the plans will make to raising pupils' achievement. Plans are not explicit enough about which groups of pupils, in which classes, need to make good or better progress in each subject.

The governing body have been slow to respond to the findings of the last inspection. They are in the process of reorganising the structure of the governing body. It is not yet clear how the new structure will divide roles and responsibilities and establish a programme of monitoring. The headteacher's reports provide members of the governing body with the big picture in terms of attendance, pupils' behaviour and staff training. However, governors do not receive enough information on the progress made by different groups of pupils in different classes. This limits the extent to which governors are able to check the effectiveness of the school's actions and hold school leaders to account.

Senior leaders and governors have acted promptly to raise their concerns about the new premises and to improve pupils' welfare and safety. Additional gates have recently been installed around the outdoor areas of the school. Staffing levels have been increased at playtimes to ensure pupils are supervised in the outdoor areas that surround the new building. However, governors and senior leaders are aware that the balcony areas outside classrooms represent a high degree of risk for the pupils that attend their school.

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

Since the inspection, the local authority has been too slow to respond and has not provided sufficient support. Senior leaders have developed their action plans without the benefit of local authority guidance and support. The National Leader in Education who has supported the school previously has continued to provide helpful support. Leaders of sixth form provision, teaching assistants and individual classteachers have all benefitted from visiting the partner school and have improved their practice as a result. The school requires further support from other schools who have successfully

developed systems to track the progress of pupils with disabilities and special educational needs from Early Years Foundation Stage to sixth form that align with the requirements of the new National Curriculum and GCSE programmes of study.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield

Her Majesty's Inspector