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9 November 2015

Helen Palmer
Merton Junior School
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Dear Miss Palmer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Merton Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 20 October 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 May 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms and looked at pupils' work with the English and mathematics leaders. I spoke with some pupils about their work. I looked at a range of documents and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

Since the last inspection, three teachers have left and five new teachers have joined. The school has started a phased expansion from two-form entry to three-form entry. In September 2015, two additional classes opened and there are now 10 classes.

Main findings

You have wasted no time in putting into place important changes to address the areas identified in your last inspection. Your positive and determined response has ensured that all staff understand what needs to be done and are playing their part in making improvements. You have worked closely with teachers to redefine their responsibilities and make sure that their ambitions for pupils are suitably high. You have reviewed your expectations and ensured that only the best is good enough in all aspects of the school's work. Leaders have swiftly increased expectations of the presentation of pupils' work. Already, pupils' books consistently show that learners take greater pride in their work. As a result, pupils' handwriting is much improved.

You lead by example and have sought ways to refine some aspects of your own work. You have worked closely with other leaders, from good schools, to identify ways to improve checks on teaching and learning. You have developed systematic checks, involving all leaders, to make sure that teaching is having a stronger impact on pupils' learning. You have also worked with the local authority to ensure that your judgements of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate. As a result, you have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

The action plan is well focused to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last inspection. You have used your knowledge of the school's current performance to set out appropriate actions. There are clearly defined milestones to measure success. Governors established the rapid improvement group to challenge leaders to make changes promptly and deliver the best possible outcomes for pupils. Through regular meetings, governors check progress against the plan. Governors receive helpful information about pupils' progress from school leaders. However, they do not yet make the best use of pupil progress information, to further challenge leaders.

The capable middle leaders are striving to improve teaching and learning. They have a sound understanding of pupil progress information and are using this, along with information from checks on teaching, to make sure that the curriculum meets pupils' needs. For example, the English leader recognised that achievement in spelling was not in line with national standards and has introduced a new approach to teaching spelling. Middle leaders have made changes to project work in Year 3 to ensure that essential learning in reading and writing takes place as soon as pupils join the school. Middle leaders work very closely with teachers and support them on an individual basis. There is a clear commitment to helping staff to develop. Subject leaders have recently received training to help them fulfil their new roles. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work.

Improvements to the quality of teaching are not yet secure. This is because there are a large proportion of new teachers this year who rely on the support of middle leaders. Nevertheless, teachers know what leaders expect of them and are keenly

acting on advice. Teachers are starting to use questioning better to deepen pupils' learning. Pupils are responding well to more detailed feedback from teachers. Pupils are writing at greater length because teachers provide more regular opportunities for extended writing.

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

You make judicious use of a range of support. Teachers and leaders visit other schools to make sure that their assessments of pupils' learning are accurate. The local authority provides effective support to middle leaders and works closely with them to make valuable changes to the curriculum. Local authority advisers visit the school regularly, evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and check that the school is making progress towards becoming a good school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Hampshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon

Her Majesty's Inspector