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Mrs Petrina Winsor
Executive headteacher
Parsons Down Junior School
Herons Way
Thatcham
RG19 3SR

Dear Mrs Winsor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parsons Down Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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 April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the head of school, the assistant headteacher and the English coordinator to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met with the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor. I also met a representative of the local authority and spoke to another on the telephone. You took me on a tour and I visited each class. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's improvement plans. I also looked at some pupils' books with the head of school.

Main findings

Standards in the 2015 Key Stage 2 tests were disappointing and lower than you had expected. Attainment and progress were well below national averages for reading and mathematics, including at the higher levels. Standards in writing were in line with national averages. Following the inspection and these Key Stage 2 results you changed leadership roles within the school. This was designed to improve the rigour with which leaders monitor how well pupils are learning. You have strengthened the ways teachers check what pupils know and understand at the beginning of a new topic and have reorganised lessons to allow pupils more time to catch up. It is not clear how you intend to measure the impact of these changes, particularly for the most-able pupils. Teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders are working hard to implement this new methodology and work in books shows some pupils are now making faster progress. However, this is inconsistent across classes. Middle leaders are focused on supporting teachers with lesson planning rather than checking how well pupils are learning and progressing.

You and your leadership team have worked diligently to bring about necessary improvements in English grammar, punctuation and spelling. You have implemented new approaches to the teaching of spelling with raised expectations about marking and feedback. Across all years, pupils are taking more care to spell accurately and usually correct spelling mistakes in their work. During my visit to classrooms, pupils were working purposefully on their writing tasks.

Although you have taken action to tackle some of the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report, robust systems to evaluate the impact of your actions are not in place. In addition, performance information from the 2015 Key Stage 2 results has not been analysed sufficiently, leading to weak self-evaluation. As a result, neither of the two school improvement plans describe clearly steps to improve outcomes in mathematics and reading, or how the assessment of pupils' work will become more accurate and reliable. The plans lack specific targets for pupil progress and clear timelines so that leaders can check that weaker areas are improving quickly. The governors' role in evaluating the impact of the school improvement plan is not clear enough.

Governors have not challenged school leaders well enough. It is not clear how the governors will hold school leaders to account for the improvements needed.

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 school is now receiving effective challenge from the local authority. School improvement advisers have accurately evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Support offered by the local authority has had limited impact so far.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector