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Mr James Allan
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Dear Mr Allan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chandos Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2016, 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 June 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 June 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and two governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke by telephone to the Chair of the Governing Body. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also met a representative from the Birmingham Education Partnership, the organisation that is providing support services to the school on behalf of the local authority. I undertook brief visits to a number of lessons accompanied by school leaders and looked at examples of pupils' work. I also spoke

to pupils during lessons. A range of the school's documents and records were also examined, including those relating to the progress and attainment of current pupils.

Context

Since the previous inspection, three governors have left the governing body. Three new governors have since joined. One member of the teaching staff joined at the start of the academic year.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have responded positively to the findings of the previous inspection. They accept and acknowledge the weaknesses that this identified. There is a shared realisation that past improvements have been too slow and the impact of leaders' work too slight. Drive and determination to raise standards are shared by governors, the headteacher and leaders at all levels. They are resolute that Chandos Primary School will become a good school.

The school improvement plan is suitably focused on tackling the issues raised by the last inspection. This plan features appropriate and well-considered strategies to bring about positive change. The plan also sets out mostly measurable criteria against which leaders are now able to gauge the success of their actions. However, some targets are still too loose. This lack of precision is also reflected in some action plans produced by middle leaders. This weakens the effectiveness of these plans. Nevertheless, the quality of these documents and the increasing clarity and sharpness with which leaders are able to articulate the impact of their actions are positive movements forward from the findings of the previous inspection.

A high priority has been given to improving the behaviour of pupils and their attitudes to learning. Leaders have wisely involved all staff in the production of a new behaviour policy and in the design of new behaviour management systems. The resulting sense of ownership and investment staff have in these has helped to ensure that these systems are adopted widely and used with a high degree of consistency. The views of pupils and staff, and information from the school's own monitoring systems, which are much stronger now, demonstrate the growing effectiveness of these new procedures on improving pupils' behaviour.

During my short visits to lessons, I saw how aspects of teaching are starting to improve because of some shared practices. The use of rewards motivates pupils to want to do well. The majority of pupils engage well with the activities that their teacher sets and get on with their work. These good attitudes to learning are increasingly evident because teachers and pupils now have shared expectations of what constitutes good conduct. However, some pupils continue to lack stamina in their learning. They lose focus on their work, stray off task and their progress slows. Some teachers are still not sufficiently vigilant to this and do not correct these behaviours quickly enough. Likewise, teachers do not always spot when pupils are

finding tasks too difficult quickly enough. As a result, some pupils struggle and their progress is hindered. Teachers explain what pupils are going to learn. This often gives pupils a clear understanding of the purpose of their learning and what they need to do to succeed in their work. However, at times teachers do not issue this guidance clearly enough, or check pupils' understanding of it. As a result, this practice does not always support pupils' learning.

A great deal of work has already been done to develop pupils' literacy skills in order to raise standards in reading and writing. This work has included additional training for teachers in the teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). Leaders have also introduced new study programmes in reading and spelling to make sure that the work pupils are set is well pitched and appropriately challenging for their abilities. Leaders in the early years have also focused well on promoting the literacy skills of children. The emerging impact of this work is becoming evident in the strong attainment expected of pupils in the Year 1 phonics test. It is also demonstrated in the improvements in the proportion of children securing a good level of development in the early years, with strong gains in the number of children who are meeting expectations in reading and writing. Pupils' books and the discussions I had with pupils during lessons show that pupils are now acquiring a more confident grasp of grammar and spelling. Leaders rightly acknowledge the need to now ensure that pupils have further opportunities to apply their understanding and skills within extended written contexts.

The school's information about the performance of pupils is showing a generally positive pattern of improvement in the progress and attainment of current pupils. However, there still remain some inconsistencies across year groups in how well pupils are achieving in reading and writing and variations between the attainment of boys and girls. Leaders have identified these issues and are taking suitable steps to remedy them. Leaders are now seeking assurances of the accuracy of their assessment information through moderation by other schools.

Further work has been undertaken to bring about improvements in other aspects of the school's provision. The programmes of study for mathematics have been redeveloped and training undertaken on how to deliver these so as to foster quicker gains in pupils' mathematical skills. The religious education curriculum has been changed to better raise pupils' awareness of different faiths, and further enhance their understanding by visiting places of worship. The positive impact of some of these changes was seen in pupils' learning during a religious education lesson in which the teacher promoted the values of tolerance and respect effectively. Pupils engaged with great enthusiasm and thought in their work surrounding these issues.

Governors realise that they have been too accepting of the information presented to them in the past. They are increasingly willing and able to challenge the information they are offered by leaders in order to gain an accurate and realistic picture of the school's performance. They have ensured that closer links are forged with leaders in key areas in order to gain an understanding of the impact of leaders' work first-

hand. They are keen to further develop their own skills and expertise and are currently seeking an external review of their work to help them in doing this.

External support

Leaders are 'outward facing' and open to advice and guidance to help the school to move forward. Leaders have actively sought support from other schools. Leaders benefit from a range of networks and collaborative partnerships. These are helping to strengthen their work in areas such as assessment. The support of the Birmingham Education Partnership is valued. This organisation has helped to identify new partnerships for the school and enabled leaders to access high-quality training opportunities and participate in new networks. The district lead of the Birmingham Education Partnership, who oversees support for the school, has a good understanding of what the school needs to do to move forward further.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Birmingham.

Yours sincerely

Chris Chapman
Her Majesty's Inspector