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Mrs Kay Bridson
Stratford-sub-Castle VC Primary School
Stratford Road
Stratford-sub-Castle
Salisbury
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SP1 3LL

Dear Mrs Bridson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stratford-sub-Castle VC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 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 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.

The school should take further action to:

- specify in the school development plan which leaders are responsible for checking the impact of each action to improve the school and how and when this work will be undertaken
- state which governor will evaluate the impact of these actions and how and when this will be done
- ensure there is a sharp focus on checking the progress of all groups of pupils, so that the governors can accurately assess the impact of teaching on the achievement of all pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke to parents informally at the start of the school day to gather their views on the school. I visited classrooms with you to observe learning and pupils' attitudes to learning. I looked at work in pupils' English, mathematics and topic books with your deputy headteacher. Informal discussions were held with pupils during lunchtime. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's records of the outcomes of monitoring activities undertaken by you and minutes of recent governing body meetings. In addition, the school's development plan and the school's safeguarding procedures and policies were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the governors have appointed two new teachers, including a newly qualified teacher in the mixed Year 1 and 2 class. The deputy headteacher is now teaching in the Reception class for four days each week. In addition, two teaching assistants have joined the school.

Main findings

You have set about improving the school with determination and the urgency required to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The many staff changes have presented a challenge in delivering the consistency of approach in the teaching of English and mathematics that you rightly insist on. However, you are now well placed to drive your planned improvements at an appropriate pace to ensure all pupils achieve well and make good progress, particularly in writing and mathematics.

Your key focus has been to improve the quality of writing and drive up standards in this subject. Staff are working effectively together to plan work which is inspiring and motivating pupils to write. As a result, teachers now have higher expectations for their pupils. Work in books confirms that pupils have increased opportunities to write at length to develop their understanding and skills in writing in a range of genres. Teachers encourage pupils to check their own learning in lessons against the 'moon, sun, stars and shooting stars' success criteria. This is helping the most-able pupils, in particular, to get started quickly and also encouraging all pupils to be independent and reflective learners. Pupils take pride in their work and told me, 'writing is fun'. Consequently, the school's own information confirms that pupils are making better progress. However, you and your leaders agree some inconsistencies in the implementation of your marking and feedback approach remain. Pupils read teachers' comments but are not always given time to respond and review their learning. As a result, not all pupils are being challenged to improve their work sufficiently and this is slowing the progress they are capable of.

Pupils' achievement in the tests at the end of the last academic year in mathematics fell well below the national average for pupils in Year 6. This was not expected. However, you and the subject leader are rising to the challenge of improving teaching and learning in this subject. Your new approach to teaching mathematics has strengthened teachers' subject knowledge and provided a structure to be able to deliver the demands of the new National Curriculum. You and your staff are focusing on tightening up the rigour and quality of teachers' planning, assessment and monitoring systems to ensure no pupil falls behind. You have introduced well-planned support activities to ensure any gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are swiftly addressed. As we discussed, the challenge is to ensure that leaders frequently check the achievement and progress of all pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able. Although work in books confirms teachers' raised expectations and increased subject knowledge, you agree that your monitoring activities need to focus more rigorously on the learning and outcomes of all groups of pupils so that they achieve well and make good progress.

Governors are ambitious for the school and committed to making the improvements needed. They visit the school regularly and provide both challenge and support to school leaders and staff. They have acted swiftly to improve the rigour and impact of their work following their review of governance. For example, they have appointed a new clerk to governors. This is strengthening the school's procedures for recording the impact of their work. Minutes of meetings record increasingly challenging questions being asked of school leaders confirming their developing knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, you are currently seeking to recruit new governors. These appointments will be crucial to strengthen the ongoing monitoring of the school's actions. You agree that the school development plan needs to be refined to set out exactly who, when and how your leaders and governors, and especially those new to their role, will check that planned actions are making a difference to pupils' outcomes.

External support

The local authority is providing strong support to you and your staff. Following the inspection, you reviewed and significantly tightened the school's safeguarding procedures and policies with the support of the local authority. All policies now take account of the most recent government legislation, including the school's response to the 'Prevent' duty (government advice to schools to have regard to the need to identify signs of extremism and radicalisation). Specific support to improve standards and quality of teaching in writing and mathematics is being effective, resulting in increased quality and quantity of work in pupils' books in these subjects.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Education for the Diocese of Salisbury, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Leahy
Her Majesty's Inspector