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Mr P Thorne
Interim Executive Headteacher
Parsons Down Infant School
Paynesdown Road
Thatcham
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RG19 3TE

Dear Mr Thorne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parsons Down Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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.

The school should take urgent action to:

- assess rigorously the security of the site and manage the risks identified.

The school should take further action to:

- raise expectations of how pupils should behave in lessons, so that they are attentive and follow instructions

- ensure that leaders' actions to improve teaching focus more on how well pupils are learning, rather than what teachers are doing
- identify pupils who have the potential to make more progress than expected, and provide the necessary support so that they do so.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the head of school, a group of governors, including the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, other leaders and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed a range of documentation, including those relating to safety and safeguarding, minutes of governors' meetings and the school improvement plan. I also visited classes with you and the head of school, and looked at work in books.

Context

The school has been through a period of substantial change, following the recent departure of the executive headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body. The head of school, who joined the school at the beginning of this academic year, has been leading the school since the beginning of this term. You joined the school today as interim executive headteacher. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body and a new vice-chair.

Main findings

Although leaders have taken some appropriate actions to improve the school, there remain inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and progress of pupils. Leaders are effective at driving improvements but they are focusing too much on specifics, such as handwriting, and not enough on improving learning. This means that although improvements are being made, they are not enough to result in good progress for all pupils and groups.

Leaders are not ambitious enough for what pupils can achieve. They check assessment information and, once pupils have fallen behind, put extra support in place to help them catch up. However, because they do not predict what pupils should achieve by the end of the year and key stage, they do not identify pupils who have the ability to make more rapid progress.

Governors are becoming more effective in their roles. They recognise that they did not know enough about their roles and trusted what they were told too much. They have taken advice and are receiving useful training from experienced governors and the local authority, so that they can now hold leaders to account for school

improvement and ask questions about pupils' progress. However, they are in the early stages of this more proactive approach.

Teaching is improving. However, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. Leaders ensure that lessons are well-planned across the year group. This means that weaker teachers are effectively supported to provide activities which are broadly at the right level for the range of pupils' needs. Where teachers are more effective, they use lesson time well to assess learning and, where necessary, refine activities to challenge or support pupils' learning. Too often this does not happen, so many pupils do not make as much progress as they should.

In the early years, teaching is more consistent. Children select activities with purpose and often play for a sustained period of time. They cooperate well and negotiate with each other to share toys and tidy up. However, there are inconsistencies across the classes, with some areas being calmer and more organised than others. During my visit there was an enormous selection of activities. Although many children coped well with so much to choose from, a few children took longer to settle or sat quietly in the cloakroom area.

Pupil progress is variable. Leaders' determination to improve presentation has been effective; pupils take more pride in their work and handwriting is improving. Pupils are catching up to where they ought to be in reading as a result of the improvements in phonics teaching. Leaders' careful checks and analysis of progress show this. Progress in writing is more erratic. Expectations of what can be achieved are not always as high as they need to be and teachers do not tailor teaching to the specific needs of pupils. Progress in mathematics is inconsistent. Where teaching is effective, pupils are making much improved progress.

Behaviour in lessons is not as good as it should be in some classes. Staff are caring and supportive of pupils, but they do not tackle low-level disruption. At times, when they are meant to be reflecting on their learning and what they have achieved, some pupils do not listen and teachers do not notice. It is positive that behaviour is reported to governors but the relatively high number of 'red cards' which are given for significant behavioural incidents, such as hitting, reflect that expectations of behaviour are not high enough.

During my visit, you and I identified a site security issue which had not been appropriately risk assessed and managed. As you rightly identified, urgent action is required. Risk assessments in many areas lack rigour.

External support

The local authority has provided very effective support to the school over a sustained period. The current executive headteacher arrangements were brought about by the local authority's involvement. Similarly, the local authority ensured an experienced governor is now on the governing body and taking a lead as vice-chair. However, the local authority also have a part to play in the safety of the site and,

this case, they have not provided sufficient help and guidance to the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Her Majesty's Inspector