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10 March 2016

Mr Robin Turner
Headteacher
Dereham, Toftwood Community Junior School
38 Westfield Road
Dereham
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Dear Mr Turner

Requires improvement: first monitoring inspection visit to Dereham, Toftwood Community Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 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 July 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 July 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 you, the deputy headteacher, staff, a group of pupils, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and the local and national leaders in education attached to the school, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We observed teaching and learning in every class for a short time.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement, a senior leader and class teacher have left the school for promotion. A senior teacher has been appointed assistant special educational needs coordinator and three newly qualified teachers have joined the staff.

Main findings

Since the last inspection you, senior leaders and governors have taken immediate action to review the school improvement plan and align this with the Ofsted inspection key issues. However the plan lacks clarity because it is not sufficiently focused on two areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

You have put in place robust systems for monitoring pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. You have redirected the deputy headteacher's time so that she spends every morning in different classes, supporting teachers and checking how well pupils are learning. You have ensured that the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders give effective support to newly qualified teachers. You have evaluated and made changes to the intervention programmes that support disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up with learning in English and mathematics. As a result, these pupils are making accelerated progress.

Teachers are very keen to improve their teaching. They have worked hard to implement the wide range of advice they have received from external advisers. You and senior leaders are in the process of evaluating this external advice and deciding which initiatives make the most difference to pupils' learning and progress over time. You acknowledge that currently there are too many initiatives and teachers are sometimes confused about what to do first. Pupils are also unclear about some of the new approaches in their classrooms and sometimes confuse one with another.

You have ensured that middle leaders are trained to carry out their role in supporting teachers to plan better lessons. This approach is beginning to make a difference but is very recent, so has not had time to show an impact on pupil outcomes.

Governors have supported the school well. They do challenge you and senior leaders, but recently they have been too focused on exploring a possible change to the status of the school. This has added considerable burden to your workload and reduced the time available to focus on the key areas for improvement from the Ofsted inspection.

During the inspection we agreed that an additional priority is to improve the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work.

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 local authority is giving a good level of support to the school and you have been keen to take up all the support offered. Unfortunately, your passion to improve the school rapidly has resulted in an overload of advice. Consequently, teachers, governors and senior leaders are not clear which idea to put into practice first.

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

Yours sincerely

Julie Winyard
Her Majesty's Inspector