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12 October 2015

Mrs Pip Joyce
Great Meols Primary School
Elwyn Road
Meols
Wirral
Merseyside
CH47 7AP

Dear Mrs Joyce

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Great Meols Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 September 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about outcomes for pupils.

Evidence

During my visit, I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements. I evaluated the school improvement plan and the mathematics development plan, as well as governing body reports relating to standards in mathematics. I also considered the most recent school assessment information and your records of checks on the quality of teaching.

I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, three middle leaders (progress leaders), two members of the governing body and a small group of non-teaching staff. I met with a group of Key Stage 1 pupils to discuss their learning in mathematics and evaluated a range of pupils' mathematics books from Years 2, 3 and 6. I visited six classrooms for approximately 20 minutes each to observe learning in mathematics and to speak to pupils.

Context

Great Meols is a larger than average primary school with 428 pupils on roll. Most pupils are of White British heritage, while the proportion of pupils for whom English is not or is believed not to be their first language is below the national average. The proportion of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding (pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free schools meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is below the national average. The proportion of pupils included in the register of special educational needs is also below the national average. Fewer pupils leave or join the school at different times of the year than in other schools nationally. A new mathematics subject leader and a new deputy headteacher both took up post in September 2015.

This monitoring inspection was carried out in response to a decline in standards in mathematics and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

The reason for the inspection came as no surprise to you or the governors; you know the strengths and weakness of your school well. You are acutely aware that in mathematics, the achievement of pupils leaving Year 6 fell in 2013 and 2014. Your swift implementation of a range of carefully considered actions successfully arrested this decline. As a result, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected and above the expected levels in mathematics improved in 2015 and is in line with that seen nationally. You accurately identify that the progress of pupils who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding and those who previously achieved below age-related expectations at the end of Key Stage 1 needs improvement.

Following analysis of school data, you and senior leaders have wasted no time in drawing up a mathematics action plan that maps out a number of further actions to improve pupil outcomes. Improving the progress of lower-ability pupils and girls is given particular prominence. You have identified criteria that will enable you to measure success at the end of this academic year. However, a lack of interim milestones, to gauge your progress towards success along the way, means that governors are not able to hold you to account fully throughout the year.

Through rigorous analysis of test answers and listening to what pupils tell middle leaders, you have identified that some pupils are not making the progress expected of them due to crucial gaps in their mathematical knowledge. You have introduced weekly skills tests that help to identify these gaps for individuals and groups of pupils. Class teachers use this information during 'guided mathematics' sessions to ensure that these gaps are now being plugged. While it is too early to fully measure the impact of this strategy, middle leaders are confident that improvements are starting to be seen. This concept is being further developed through 'peer mentoring'. I observed this having a considerable impact on learning in a Year 5 class where two pupils helped another pupil to develop his understanding of numerical patterns.

Teachers' structured approach to introducing new mathematical ideas helps pupils to gain a solid mathematical understanding before progressing further. In a Year 5

class, for example, pupils were skilfully guided through an enjoyable and collaborative activity that carefully built their estimation and rounding skills. This enabled them to calculate financial expenditure successfully. However, evidence in pupils' workbooks (particularly those working below age-related expectations), in a small number of classes, shows that some pupils are being moved on before they have a secure grasp of the mathematics being taught. This is a significant contributing factor to some pupils developing gaps in their knowledge and understanding over time.

Opportunities for pupils to develop reasoning, investigative and problem-solving skills are not always being exploited fully across the school. While there are pockets of good practice, such as the investigation I observed to find shapes of the same area with different perimeters in Year 4, this is not mirrored consistently in all classes. Furthermore, these opportunities are most often limited to most-able pupils. As a result, those pupils with the greatest need to secure their understanding of mathematical concepts, through investigative and problem-solving activities, are not currently being given enough opportunities to do this.

Middle leaders share your determination to further improve pupils' achievement in mathematics. They are developing their role to hold teachers to account through pupil progress meetings, book scrutiny and lesson observations. Feedback to teachers is supportive and highlights some further areas for improvement. However, these checks do not always get deeply enough to the heart of the matter. This is because the checks being undertaken are sometimes too wide ranging and do not always focus specifically on identified areas that need to improve.

Middle leaders have also astutely developed action plans for different year groups to further improve the systems for the monitoring of pupils' progress across the school. This includes the progress of disadvantaged pupils, looked after pupils and pupils who have special educational needs. As a result, leaders at all levels are able to hold teachers to greater account, at more regular intervals.

In the past, you and governors have had a distorted view of the achievement of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. This is because you have compared their attainment against similar pupils, rather than pupils who are not eligible for pupil premium funding. As a result, governors have not held information that has enabled them to hold you to account fully for the effectiveness of pupil premium funding spending. You are at the early stages of tackling this issue. You and the deputy headteacher have devised a new format for checking the progress of this group of pupils. Each teacher and progress leader now has this group of pupils firmly on their radar. However, your efforts to redress this issue are at an early stage and therefore it is not yet possible to judge the impact of your actions.

Governors are playing an important role in supporting you to redress the fall in standards in mathematics. They have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the school and its strengths and weaknesses. They use the information available to them to ask searching questions about achievement in mathematics. Their evaluation of the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has been clouded due to a lack of

understanding of how to make valuable comparisons against other pupils. Nonetheless, they have used the data available to them to ask challenging questions about the progress of this group of pupils. With you, they are leaving no stone unturned in the search to find further opportunities for improvements.

Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that standards in mathematics and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils are no longer as reported at the previous inspection. This mirrors your self-evaluation of current standards within the school. You, senior leaders and governors have a firm grasp of the issues and are taking appropriate actions to address these. Nevertheless, I will bring the decline in standards to the attention of the Regional Director.

External support

The local authority has had light-touch involvement with the school in recent years. However, this term, you are beginning to work with the local authority mathematics consultant to undertake an audit of teaching and learning throughout the school.

Priorities for further improvement

- Ensure that sufficient time is given to enable pupils to grasp mathematical concepts before moving on to new learning.
- Make certain all pupils have greater opportunities to develop their mathematical and reasoning skills through problem-solving and investigative activities.
- Narrow the achievement gap for disadvantaged pupils across the school.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Wirral, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell
Her Majesty's Inspector