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Mrs Helina Kirkman
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kirkman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Somerlea Park Junior School.

Following my visit to your school on 7 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 taken since the monitoring inspection conducted in October 2015.

The visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority 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.

HMI recommends that urgent action is taken to:

- improve the quality of teaching
- ensure that leaders new to their role receive effective support
- refine school improvement planning to focus on the key issues identified at the last section 5 inspection
- implement the actions identified by the review of pupil premium funding.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the Chair of the Governing Body. I also met with two senior representatives from the local authority and the headteacher mentor, who is currently working with you for two days a week. I reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks, the school's strategy and improvement plan and information about pupils' progress and attendance. The local authority action plan was also discussed. You and I conducted a walk of the school and observed learning in all year groups.

Context

The substantive headteacher is not in school. You have been the acting headteacher since November 2015. Two assistant headteachers have been appointed from within the school, on a temporary basis. Currently, a headteacher mentor is supporting your work for two days each week. The school is now being supported by two senior advisers from the local authority. A review of pupil premium spending and its impact took place in October 2015.

Main findings

The previous monitoring visit in October 2015 identified that a great deal of improvement was required if the school was to be judged as a good school at its next section 5 inspection. Under difficult circumstances your leadership has made a difference. There has clearly been positive change within the school since I conducted the first monitoring visit in October. However, there is still much to be done if the school is to become a good school by the time of its next section 5 inspection.

The governing body has provided highly effective support. The Chair of the Governing Body is experienced, skilled and well informed. He has committed a great deal of energy and time to ensure that the issues identified at the previous monitoring visit are being addressed. A review of governance took place after the section 5 inspection in April 2015. Governors have responded positively to the findings of this review and have refined their ways of working to make sure that their support is increasingly effective. Governors are playing a critical role in the improvement journey for the school. They know that weaknesses in teaching and leadership remain.

You appreciate the very effective support you receive from the headteacher mentor. The newly appointed assistant headteachers have not had the support they need to carry out their roles effectively. Making sure that leaders receive the appropriate support is a key priority. Additionally, the local authority and governors need to be satisfied that the support provided is sharply focused on improving pupils' outcomes and makes enough difference.

Leaders have worked effectively to make sure that the school improvement plan now has clear actions and appropriate success criteria. This plan is a working document and you are using it to steer improvement activity. However, it remains a lengthy document. We discussed the need to focus on the key priorities that will ensure that the school becomes a good school. Leaders, governors and local authority advisers need to monitor more regularly the progress the school is making because the pace of improvement needs to accelerate.

The information about pupils' achievement is clearer and better understood by teaching staff and leaders. Classroom teachers are now able to plan learning appropriately because there is greater understanding of pupils' starting points and the progress that is needed for pupils to achieve age-related expectations. You lead pupil progress meetings for each class to check that pupils are making the progress expected. A well-understood process is now in place to make sure that classroom teachers are held to account for the progress that pupils make within their class. Nevertheless, too many pupils are still not making the progress that they should. This includes those supported through the pupil premium funding. It is important that leaders complete all of the actions following the review of pupil premium funding which took place in October 2015, in order to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

There is a long legacy of underperformance within this school. We discussed the weaknesses evident from our observations of learning. The quality of teaching remains an area of concern. The focus must now be on making sure that teaching quality rapidly improves so that pupils are helped to catch up quickly.

I intend to carry out further monitoring inspections. At my next visit I will conduct further observations of learning and look at the work in pupils' books.

External support

The school is supported by two senior local authority advisers. This is welcome. The local authority support now needs to be focused on helping leaders, new to role, accelerate pupils' progress. It is important that you continue to benefit from the support of the headteacher mentor.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Ashman
Her Majesty's Inspector