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Dear Mrs Mepham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fowlmere Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 April 2016 with Tracy Fielding HMI, 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 November 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:

- provide clear and precise performance management targets for all staff
- ensure that consistent systems and processes are in place in early years so that children experience a high-quality provision that encourages positive learning attitudes
- ensure that targets in the school's improvement plan are more sharply focused so that the correct changes are made quickly and evaluated effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, five representatives of the governing body and a representative of the

local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We observed pupils learning in all classes and spoke informally with them about their lessons. The quality of learning over time was evaluated through looking at pupils' books. We examined a number of school documents and checked the school's procedures for vetting staff and managing staff performance. An email sent directly to Ofsted was also considered.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been some significant staff changes. In the early years class, you have recently appointed a new teacher who shares the leadership responsibility for the quality of learning for the youngest children in the school. A specialist science teacher has left the school, together with a part-time finance manager. Plans are securely in place to ensure that science is a key part of the curriculum.

Main findings

Since the inspection, leaders, staff and governors have adapted their school improvement plans. You are rightly prioritising the issues highlighted in the previous inspection and continue to increase the accountability of staff through more regular checks on pupils' progress. Consequently you have a more secure grasp of the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. Your current evaluation of the school's performance is accurate.

Much of the work on improvements has just begun and the impact is yet to be clearly seen. This is especially the case in the early years class. This is because governors and leaders have correctly focused on addressing the issues around staff morale and the contribution staff make to school improvement. This they have successfully achieved. Most staff now speak of positive changes within the school and how much they appreciate the training and new communication system that is in place. As a result, you are raising the expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Although teaching staff have precise targets for their own performance, leaders have yet to ensure the same level of accountability for support staff. This is something that the governors are now ensuring that you complete swiftly. Governors are rightly aware that the speed of improvement now needs to hasten so that pupils progress well and achieve the standards of which they are fully capable.

You have introduced a new assessment system so that teachers can monitor and record how well pupils are achieving in lessons. This new system is providing useful information for leaders to identify gaps in learning and see how well pupils are achieving. You are using this information more regularly in meetings to discuss pupils' progress and to take decisive action where pupils are not making the progress they should. As yet the information that you give to governors is not analysed well enough. As a result, at times the questions that governors ask are not sufficiently challenging and precise to enable them to strategically monitor the impact of leaders' work.

As leaders, you are aware that this year, given the rise in national standards, there are gaps in pupils' learning that are challenging to fill, particularly for the older pupils. Through additional funds, teachers have been given time to provide extra support for these older pupils. This is showing positive signs of impact, with more pupils achieving age-related expectations. In other parts of the school, you have provided support staff with additional training to carry out specific support programmes. As a result, individual pupils now benefit from additional help and guidance to gain necessary skills in numeracy and literacy.

The evidence in books shows that many pupils are now making faster progress in writing and mathematics than seen in the previous inspection. Teachers plan learning to stretch and challenge pupils, particularly the most able. In a mathematics lesson seen, pupils told me that they feel well prepared for secondary school because their teacher makes sure they have to think hard and grapple with mathematical concepts that keep them focused.

In an English lesson, the Year 2 pupils were keen to demonstrate how to use adjectives and subject-specific language to make their writing of a fox's diary more interesting. They were able to explain how they improve their writing well. When one pupil read the redrafted work to the class, there was spontaneous applause for the enhanced result.

Pupils' presentation of their work has improved dramatically. This is due to your insistence that all adults demand higher levels of presentation in every lesson. There is now a cohesive approach across the school. Consequently, the quality of work in pupils' books has much improved and pupils show a greater sense of pride. You have changed the teaching of spelling across all classes through implementing a chosen method of systematic teaching. In all lessons seen, teachers insisted on pupils using their newly acquired spelling skills to good effect.

In early years, not enough has been done to accelerate improvement. This is because there has recently been a change in personnel. The leadership of early years is now shared and very new. At present some adults do not give sufficient guidance and support to ensure that individual children develop positive learning attitudes and develop their skills. For example, although there are more activities where children can practise their writing skills, adults do not encourage or show children how to make the best use of equipment during their play. Consequently, some children are left to their own devices for too long, without the encouragement they need to develop good learning habits at the start of their education. You are determined to eradicate these inconsistencies that have existed in early years by clearly setting out what you expect of adults. Your plans show that with a more consistent approach, the quality of teaching and learning in the early years will change, and improve at a faster pace.

Your records and documentation, especially when recruiting and vetting new staff, are meticulously kept. You ensure that staff adhere to the procedures and processes for keeping pupils safe in school.

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

You are working closely with the local authority and value the support it is providing to help you make improvements. You are now receiving regular and practical support to improve the quality of learning in the early years class. The local authority now carries out half-termly visits to hold school leaders to account even more rigorously for the pace of improvement.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kim Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector