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Mr Carl Messer
Headteacher
St George's New Town Junior School
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Dear Mr Messer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St George's New Town Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 7 June 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 December 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- review the actions are being taken to improve the school; then, use this information to make appropriate amendments so that the strong rate of improvement is maintained
- ensure that teachers who are not consistently applying school policies across all subject do so
- carry out the review of pupil premium spending as a matter of urgency.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and middle leaders, four teachers, a group of 12 pupils, four governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. A range of documentation, which included the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings and assessment information, was evaluated. I observed pupils at work during two walks of lessons with you. Pupils' work in books was also scrutinised.

Context

Since the previous inspection, one teacher has left the school and four teachers, some of whom are part time, have been appointed. You have also altered the composition of the school's senior team so that it now includes the coordinator of special educational needs and two phase leaders (teachers with overall responsibility for the learning of year groups). You have also made appointments to replace the six teachers who are due to leave the school at the end of this academic year.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have quickly and successfully established a clear, shared understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that the school improves. You achieved this while improving the morale of staff, who explained that they welcome leaders' clarity along with their additional support and challenge since the previous inspection. One teacher commented that, 'We now all know the direction in which we are going.' Her colleagues echoed this sentiment. Pupils informed me that since the previous inspection they have noticed an improvement in their lessons, and that their teachers are very focused on how pupils can improve their work.

You and your school leaders have developed a sharply focused school improvement plan. This plan correctly prioritises what leaders need to do to ensure that the school improves quickly. Evidence seen on inspection indicates that, while you are making significant progress towards meeting your ambitious targets, there needs to be a full review of the actions being taken to ensure that the momentum of improvement is maintained over the coming year.

You have adopted a well thought out approach to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result of the effective training that they have received, senior and middle leaders are better skilled when monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Teachers are more clearly held accountable for the outcomes that their pupils achieve. This has been welcomed by teachers, who feel professionally challenged and supported. You are correctly challenging practice that is not good enough. Consequently, teaching practice is improved and this is having a positive impact on the progress that pupils are making. Appropriate training has helped teachers to gain a clearer understanding of the quality of work pupils are capable of producing. As a result, many teachers' assessment of pupils is more accurate. You are aware that this is not uniformly the case, especially in some Year 4 pupils' books, and are taking action to make sure that this is improved.

The skilful work of your deputy headteacher is ensuring that leaders have a more precise understanding of the skills and knowledge that pupils arrive at school with. Teachers are using the accurate assessment information about pupils' starting points more effectively in many lessons. Where teachers make good use of their detailed knowledge of what pupils are capable of achieving, the learning interests and challenges pupils. For example, the teacher's appropriate use of targeted questioning helped Year 5 pupils to deepen their knowledge of mathematics in a classroom buzzing with enthusiasm and good humour. However, this assessment information is not used with the same care in all year groups, nor across all subjects. For example, in science, Year 4 pupils of all abilities were provided with the same work which was too simple for the most able and limited the progress that they were able to make.

You have raised expectations of how pupils should present work in their books. Pupils clearly understand the school's chosen 'Present with pride' initiative and this is having a positive impact on the presentation of their work. As one pupil commented, 'It motivates us to present things in a better way.' Inspection evidence demonstrates that this is particularly effective in pupils' work in English and mathematics. Teachers are not as thorough at insisting on the same high levels of presentation across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not apply the same effective techniques in other subjects, such as science.

The coordinator of special educational needs has worked effectively to ensure that there is more timely help for pupils who have special educational needs or disability as well as for other pupils who need extra support in their learning. For example, learning support assistants have been provided with the necessary training to help them to provide more appropriate support for pupils. This is not consistently effective because, as pupils explained, while they welcome the support given in years 5 and 6, in some Year 4 classes they sometimes have to wait too long for help when they get stuck in their work. Inspection evidence demonstrates that, overall, lower-ability pupils are making improved progress, especially in English. However, there is work to be done to make sure that these pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work demonstrate the same care as those of their peers.

You have made clear the feedback you expect teachers to provide on pupils' work. Where this is appropriately applied, it has a considerable impact on the progress that pupils make. This impact can be seen in improvements that pupils are making to their writing. Pupils explained that the clear direction that most of their teachers provide on their work helps them to make improvements and, in the words of one pupil, 'It helps us to find different ways to improve our work.' As you observed from our visits to lessons, too often spellings are not corrected and this prevents pupils from understanding which is the correct spelling for some commonly used words as well as some subject-specific words.

The literacy coordinator has skilfully developed a strategy to improve the quality of writing at school. This approach is already woven into the weekly routine of pupils and staff. Teachers are more adept at assessing pupils' writing and have more confidence when teaching writing. Teachers explained that this is due to the tireless work of the literacy coordinator and the well-targeted training that she has led. As a

result, teachers and pupils know what is expected of them and are responding well. There are many more opportunities for pupils to write at length in their English lessons. This is something that they do with rapidly improving creativity and confidence, and is leading to better outcomes for pupils in their writing. As a consequence, there are greater proportions of pupils who are making more than expected progress, especially in writing. There is less evidence that teachers are providing opportunities for pupils to use the skills they are developing through your chosen 'Write to the top' approach in other subjects. This is limiting pupils' chances to demonstrate their skills and understanding in subjects such as history and science.

Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (government funding to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care) are making progress in line with, and in some cases better than, that of their peers. This is due to the effective support that they receive. You are aware that you need to be clearer about which actions have the most impact on these pupils' attendance and achievement. Governors know how the funding is spent, but remain less confident as to the impact of this spending on outcomes for pupils eligible for the pupil premium. The review of how pupil premium funding is spent is overdue and will take place alongside other work led by the local teaching school alliance.

External support

You have been unwavering in your view that St George's New Town Junior School should be prepared to work with other schools to develop the best practice that you can. You are making effective use of the support offered by two teaching school alliances. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. An audit carried out by the headteacher of an outstanding school, alongside a representative of the local authority, has confirmed leaders' judgements on where the strengths and weaknesses lie, and provided greater clarity as to what further action needs to be taken.

Essex local authority continues to provide appropriate support for the school: for example, through the 'governor improvement board' which monitors the progress towards the targets in the improvement plan. As a consequence, governors are better equipped and more prepared to challenge you and your leaders about the quality of education provided at St George's New Town Junior 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 Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector