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Elaine Close
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Dear Mrs Close

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Stonehill School

Following my visit to your school on 21 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in October 2013, 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that current changes to the curriculum provide high-quality learning in all subjects
- refine the school's action plan so that the impact of all improvement work is measurable.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, two members of the governing body and I spoke with a representative from the local authority on the telephone to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the

school's action plan, monitoring documents, governors' minutes and assessment documentation. I visited lessons in all classes with the headteacher, observing teaching and looking at pupils' work.

Context

Two teachers have left the school since the inspection in December 2015.

Main findings

Your self-evaluation is accurate. You know the strengths of the school well and where it needs to improve. You have handled staffing changes effectively and have raised expectations of learning. This has been chiefly focused on mathematics and English. The impact on the quality of pupils' work is clear to see in their books; over the course of this year the quality of pupils' writing has improved in all classes. In some cases, individual pupils have made very rapid improvement. Also, improvement is evident in pupils' mathematics books. Practical work to support pupils' understanding is helping them to move on. Leadership in mathematics is effective because it is precisely defining what is needed to move things on. Governors value the clarity of information that is provided for them in this subject. Leadership of English has not been as effective and you are currently changing things in order to rectify this.

Action planning is in place but needs to be improved. Currently, your action plan does not make it clear how you are going to measure the impact of the improvements that you are making. There are too many separate actions, based on the detail of the areas for improvement in the last inspection rather than the broader issues identified. The plan needs to be slimmed down so that it more precisely matches the current state of the school.

Behaviour in and around the school is calm, orderly and purposeful. You have raised expectations of pupils' behaviour and have introduced a system that is designed to improve pupils' attitudes to learning. Early indications are that this is working; pupils that I spoke to were enthusiastic about their work.

You have made good use of external support from the local authority. Teachers have been supported in the aspects of their work that you have identified through your monitoring activities. This has led to improvements in specific areas of the school. For example, assessment in the early years has improved. Children's learning journeys are now specific about the skills that children are demonstrating. In addition, the range of activities on offer in the outdoor area is broad and children enthusiastically learn, play and talk together.

Governors work effectively both to hold leaders to account and to provide support for their work. The minutes of governing body meetings show very clearly that

asking questions is a key part of the governor role. This is supplemented by focused visits to the school and regular dialogue between the headteacher and governors.

You are currently revising the way that the curriculum is taught. You have recognised that your focus on mathematics and English has resulted in some other subjects not being consistently well taught across the school. There are already some examples of high-quality science – in particular in Years 6 and 2 where investigations are interesting and extend pupils' thinking. It is not, however, consistent in all classes, and the coverage of some subjects, including history and geography, is too patchy.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support for the school. Leaders and governors value the guidance and the opportunities to moderate their own judgements. The support has been targeted at the leadership and management of English, mathematics and the early years.

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

Yours sincerely

Chris Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector