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Mr Scott Martin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Adeyfield School

Following my visit to your school on 6 July 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2016, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- continue to improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning, across subjects, by matching the findings from lesson observations more closely with assessment information and the scrutiny of the quality of work in pupils' books
- strengthen further the work of middle leaders so that they:
 - make accurate judgements about the achievement of all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability
 - improve their understanding of their subject area's contribution to whole-school improvement

- ensure that governors are equipped with the skills, knowledge and understanding so that they can confidently hold the school to account for the progress all pupils make.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, pupils, staff and governors, including the chair of the governing body, to discuss the action taken since the inspection in February 2016. I also spoke, by telephone, to the school improvement partner and met with a headteacher from another school who, as a national leader in education (NLE), is supporting the school on its journey towards providing a good standard of education.

In addition, I evaluated a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, attendance and behaviour records and the findings of the external reviews of governance and of pupil premium spending. I observed pupils at work in lessons, during a learning walk with the deputy headteacher, and undertook a scrutiny of their work in books.

Context

From September 2016, working in partnership with the Alban Federation, a local provider of initial teacher education, school-based teacher training will be offered on-site for trainee teachers in mathematics and science. The school's sixth form is due to merge with the sixth form of another local school at the start of the new academic year.

Main findings

You and your senior leaders have taken care to develop a school improvement plan that appropriately prioritises the actions needed to facilitate the school's journey to providing a good standard of education for all pupils. The plan is, rightly, focused on the issues raised at the last inspection. Appropriate milestones are in place for the monitoring and review of progress towards key targets. The communication of the school's ambition, expectations and high aspirations has been strengthened.

In planning for improvement, greater emphasis is now placed on the performance of disadvantaged pupils. An assistant headteacher, previously a middle leader, has recently been appointed with full responsibility for overseeing the progress and welfare of this group of pupils.

Middle leaders' roles and responsibilities are much clearer and lines of accountability have been strengthened. Checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are more frequent and rigorous. Consequently, teachers and middle leaders have a better understanding of the strengths in their subjects and what needs to improve.

Senior leaders, and those providing external support, are working closely with middle leaders to ensure that checks on teachers' performance are focused effectively on

the impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time and the contribution that subjects make to whole-school improvement. Joint observations of teaching, undertaken with skilled leaders, are securing greater consistency and accuracy in evaluations of subject teachers' performance. You rightly acknowledge that this is still work in progress and that the school remains on the journey towards ensuring that teaching leads to consistently good learning and progress for all pupils.

There is a clear system of support and challenge to help teachers to improve, through the leadership team, external support and through recently appointed expert subject leads. However, you do not sidestep difficult decisions when teaching falls short of expectations and the pace of improvement is slow.

As a result, teaching and perceptions of what pupils can achieve are beginning to improve. There are early signs that pupils are making better progress from their starting points in English, mathematics and science. My evidence from this visit has confirmed your views, and the views of the NLE providing external support, that the quality of teaching remains variable across subjects. Most of the teachers I observed, in my short learning walk, demonstrated that they are now checking pupils' learning more carefully before moving on to the next stage. However, the pupils I spoke to felt that this was not the case in some lessons.

The school's homework policy has been revised and a new online system, accessible to parents, is in place for the monitoring and review of homework set. As a result of the checks you are making, you are aware that teachers are not yet planning homework effectively enough to ensure that it is matched appropriately to pupils' learning needs.

The marking of pupils' work in books is regular, but the quality of teachers' guidance to help pupils to improve their work and to achieve higher grades is uneven. School leaders aim to eradicate these inconsistencies through systematic book reviews and follow-up action where concerns need to be addressed. These reviews are appropriately aligned with routine checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The external review of the use of pupil premium funding, to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, has been completed. Leaders now have a clearer understanding of the interventions taking place and the difference this is making to the progress of pupils who are eligible for the funding. They are now able to determine more effectively which strategies are working and those which need to be changed.

More work is needed to determine the impact of the school's interventions for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. This is because teachers are not yet equipped consistently with enough information to help them to plan, and implement confidently, effective strategies to meet the learning needs of this group of pupils.

Although gaps are closing between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and others, in particular at key stage 3, you are fully aware that more needs to be done to accelerate the pace of change in this aspect of the school's work. This is also the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils say they feel that the school is a safe and supportive 'community'. Closer work with parents is ensuring that the attendance of most groups of pupils continues to improve. Incidences of short-term exclusions are reducing and pupils feel that behaviour is managed well by most teachers. Nevertheless, the pupils I spoke with during my monitoring visit noted that, in a few lessons, behaviour is not managed as effectively as it should be.

An external review of governance has been completed. The governing body has been reconstituted since the last inspection. Governors are more acutely aware of the need to check that teaching is good enough for all groups of pupils. As a result, they have developed their own strategic plan and have undertaken a skills audit to identify key aspects of their work that needs to be improved. Further training is planned to address the training needs identified. The detail of the information they receive on pupils' progress has been extended and presented appropriately, in a more timely fashion, in advance of scheduled meetings.

Although governors feel better equipped to challenge the school's performance, their understanding and interpretation of assessment information and published data is not yet secure enough to enable them to be consistently and confidently curious in their questions to school leaders.

External support

The school is benefiting from effective external support. You are continuing to work in partnership with the Alban Federation, the Alban Teaching School Alliance and experts from the local authority. This is helping you to continue to improve teaching and the effectiveness of middle leaders. In particular, the support you receive from the NLE, who is the headteacher of a local high-performing school, is improving the capacity of middle leaders to provide appropriate levels of challenge to their teams. Working together, you are brokering opportunities for staff to learn from good practice in the school and from elsewhere. As a result, the foundations of a self-sustaining, improving school have been laid.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education the director of children's services for Hertfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector