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Mr Steven Norton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Norton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Larkhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 15 September 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 January 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 January 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:

- refine systems for tracking and monitoring the progress pupils are making so that they fully take account of the new performance measures as set out by the Department for Education from September 2016
- ensure that monitoring activities place a sharp focus on subjects other than English and mathematics and the performance of the most able pupils, especially those who are the most able disadvantaged
- further develop the curriculum in mathematics to fully meet the requirements of the new national curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for mathematics and English and three members of the governing body. I met with a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated key documents including the school improvement plan and tracking and monitoring information. Together, we conducted a learning walk to a number of classes and scrutinised pupils' work; this included the most able pupils' work. I also met with some Year 6 pupils to gain their views of the school.

Context

Since the last inspection five new teachers have joined the school, including two newly qualified teachers. You have appointed a new assistant headteacher. A new chair of governors has been nominated and is expected to take up this role in the next few weeks. The senior management team has been reorganised with new roles and responsibilities. Pupil numbers have risen from 270 to 309.

Main findings

You, senior leaders and governors are implementing the changes required in order to rapidly improve the quality of the school's work. You have built on the strengths identified in the last inspection report and are using the findings as a catalyst for change. All staff are being held more to account through specific appraisal targets that are closely linked to the effectiveness of their teaching and its impact on pupils' achievements.

Training for leaders is helping them improve their skills in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. The broader range of information now being used to judge the performance of staff over time is providing a more accurate picture of pupils' everyday learning. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are also focusing their duties more on improving the quality of teaching. Consequently, middle leaders are contributing more strongly to securing improvements across the school.

Occasionally, monitoring activities tend to focus on whether teachers are following new policies, such as marking, rather than what difference they are making to pupils' achievements. Monitoring does not yet align with the new Department for Education performance measures, or place enough emphasis on the most able pupils' progress, particularly those who are disadvantaged. It is understandable that you concentrated on monitoring pupils' achievement in English and mathematics. However, as it is also important that pupils have time to enjoy and learn about creative subjects and others such as science and the humanities, it is good that you have plans in place to monitor a wide range of subjects in the future.

The school development plan is closely aligned with the areas for development in the last full inspection report. Actions link well to the new cycle of tracking and monitoring activities to check on the changes to the curriculum and the quality of teaching. A revised set on 'non-negotiables,' designed to set a minimum level of performance, is raising teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving during lessons. In 2016, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics check improved and were above average. Year 6 pupils' attainment was above the national average in reading, writing, mathematics and grammar, with punctuation and spelling reflecting the impact of leaders' actions.

Training is supporting teachers on their journey of improvement. It is leading to improvements in teaching, planning and marking in all classes. Teachers are using the new information about pupils' gaps in learning to plan activities in lessons carefully. Lessons are adapted so that they are increasingly matched to pupils' needs.

The new policy for marking and feeding back on pupils' work is helping pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. The introduction of time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments about their work is improving pupils' dialogue with adults about how they can do even better, and this is improving their achievement. Evidence from pupils' books and work on display around the school illustrates that they are producing higher-quality writing, with better presentation, in a broader range of subjects.

Older pupils' work illustrates some examples of pupils using more than one method to solve calculations when studying mathematics in context. Pupils said that the style of teaching now motivates them to learn well and that behaviour across the school has improved further. During our joint book scrutiny you were quick to identify that the content of work in pupils' mathematics books is not yet meeting the full requirements of the new national curriculum for mathematics. Further training for staff is planned.

The governing body has responded proactively to the inspection findings. Governors understand the sense of urgency and specific actions required in order to become a good school. They are very active in joint monitoring activities, conducted alongside subject leaders, which develop their skills at knowing how to challenge the school over teachers' performance. Their strong willingness to undergo further training illustrates the collective desire to bring about the actions required in order to become a good school. The right plans are in place to secure future improvements. However, in reports obtained by governors from the school, the lack of precise detail about the quality of teaching and the current progress of groups, including the most able, hinders governors' ability to check exactly how successful school leaders' actions have been.

External support

You, your governing body and middle leaders are drawing well on the support provided by external partners. The local authority officer brings valuable external challenge and training to improve the effectiveness of leaders and governors. Meetings with local schools are helping teachers develop an increasingly accurate assessment of pupils' writing and mathematics work. Following visits by staff to local schools, new approaches to marking are providing clearer information for pupils to help them move forward with their learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector