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Mrs Louise Seavill
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Seavill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grange Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 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 March 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 March 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- raise expectations of pupils, particularly the most able, through accurate and robust use of assessment, so that more pupils achieve at a greater depth.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, the chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan, post-inspection action plan and the school's own self-evaluation were evaluated. Some lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders and pupils' work was evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, the senior leadership team has been restructured to serve better the federation that consists of the junior and infant schools. The leadership team now comprises the executive headteacher, the recently appointed heads of the junior and infant schools, the special educational needs coordinator and year group leaders. The chair of governors is now the sole chair, having shared the role at the time of the last inspection.

Main findings

You are leading the school with drive and enthusiasm. The school is steadily improving and you and other staff are drawing strength from your achievements. At the same time, however, you are clear about the work that has yet to be done to improve school outcomes. You have no illusions about the challenges that lie ahead to move the school to good. You take an honest and frank view of weaknesses so that they can be quickly and effectively tackled. You, the head of school and other staff are keen to 'get stuck into' those areas that require improvement, and weaknesses are being addressed quickly. This is because there is now greater capacity in the leadership team; good new appointments have been made and other roles clarified. Lines of accountability are clearer, staff are more confident in their roles and channels of communication are better. Consequently, staff at all levels are better able to fulfil their responsibilities, drive the necessary improvements and feel much happier in their work.

Middle leaders, in particular, value the clarity that has been brought to their role. They work positively as a team and use an effective collaborative approach to monitor teaching and learning. There is now a much more systematic approach to monitoring the performance of teachers. Middle leaders meet weekly to scrutinise pupils' work and review teachers' planning, in an effort to reinforce consistency of practice. This means that underperformance is now spotted more quickly and support, such as targeted coaching, is provided to further improve teaching quality. Middle leaders' monitoring is helping them to gain a more incisive understanding of pupils' progress.

As a result of the work of senior and middle leaders, the quality of teaching is improving across the school. Staff are sharing best practice more frequently and providing more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their learning. For example, pupils may be presented with a range of resources for an activity and they choose the resource that suits them best to achieve the lesson's objectives. The school environment, classrooms and communal areas alike have been developed to inspire pupils to engage more effectively with their learning. Dynamic, colourful 'working walls' and displays that champion pupils' high-quality extended writing challenge pupils to engage with their learning.

However, this is a work in progress. Although pupils are well behaved, cooperative and attentive, they are not yet demonstrating the inquisitiveness and enthusiasm indicative of highly positive attitudes to learning. This is particularly true of the most

able pupils because teachers do not have high enough expectations of what they can achieve. Teachers are not using assessment information well to ensure that they plan activities that stretch the most able pupils. Nevertheless, pupils are enthusing about the new homework tasks that are being set. However, this enthusiasm for learning is not yet evident to the same degree in classrooms.

Achievement is accelerating because the quality of teaching is improving. The attainment of pupils who left the school in 2016 was above average in reading, and much improved in mathematics and spelling, punctuation and grammar. Improvements in teaching are leading to 'green shoots' in achievement, but leaders know that pupils are not making sufficient progress. The work in pupils' books shows that leaders are successfully embedding the school's policy to ensure that pupils respond to the feedback provided by teachers. As a result, pupils are becoming more adept at spotting their mistakes, correcting and redrafting to improve their work. This, in turn, means that they are now making more rapid progress in different subjects.

You are well supported by governors. They understand the issues facing the school and take their roles seriously. Governors are proactive in their approach and keen to take the school forward in its journey to become a good school. The chair of governors meets with you frequently and asks the questions that need to be asked. Governors want to know what the impact is of the actions you are taking to improve the school. In this way, you and other leaders are effectively held to account.

External support

The school continues to receive good-quality external support from the school improvement partner and the local authority. Both partners were instrumental in helping to restructure leadership to build capacity and bring about closer collaboration with the infant school. They continue to provide appropriate ongoing support, brokering or delivering training to staff at different levels. Both partners are positive that the school is improving, and their view is correct. The school improvement partner commented that he is excited for the school's future. Nevertheless, both partners acknowledge that the school's assessment system is not fully fit for purpose. Although staff are becoming more confident in their use of assessment, the system is not currently being used to set higher, more appropriate targets, particularly for the most able pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector