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Fiona Price
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Dear Fiona Price

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutton-on-Trent Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 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 not 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:

- improve the quality of the school improvement plan by ensuring that you set clear actions for individual staff and leaders within measurable timescales
- implement a robust system for managing the performance of staff as a matter of urgency

- ensure that targets for pupils are suitably challenging and reflect high expectations of leaders and staff.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the interim executive principal, the acting headteacher, teachers with leadership responsibility for English and mathematics and two members of the governing body. I spoke to a representative of the local authority. I visited all classrooms, observed two lessons jointly with the acting headteacher and heard a group of pupils read. I reviewed pupils' work and a range of school documents including safeguarding records, and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

You continue to lead the work of the school in your capacity as acting headteacher following the resignation of the headteacher at the end of the summer term. There is a new school business manager and one teacher has left the school since the previous inspection. Since the beginning of this term, the leadership of the school has been supported through the work of the headteacher from Coddington Primary School, who is acting as interim executive principal for two days each week.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, the overall pace of improvement has been too slow to ensure that the school will become a good school by the time of its next section 5 inspection. The delay in restructuring the senior leadership of the school has hindered the successful implementation of the considerable changes needed. However, this is not through any lack of determination on the part of you or the governors. You continue to provide the school with stability and direction during this difficult time. You have formed an effective partnership with the part-time interim executive principal and have a shared vision for the immediate priorities for the school.

You, the interim executive principal, governors and local authority hold appropriately high expectations for the school and are not afraid to voice your resolve that the school's previous legacy of underperformance must change. The current school improvement plan addresses the key priorities for the school but it is not clear enough about what is expected of individual staff and subject leaders within measurable timeframes. The plan is not aspirational enough in setting out what is expected of the most able pupils in school. Equally so, the lack of a robust and effective system for managing the performance of teachers is having a negative impact on improving the quality of teaching at the pace which is needed.

The key challenge for senior leaders and governors is that of successfully overcoming the established complacency of some staff who continue to expect too

little of their pupils. You have begun to make some inroads but there is much more to be done.

There is evidence of improvement in some aspects of teaching and assessment in the school, and the recent partnership with Coddington Primary School appears to be showing some early signs of positive impact. Your teachers say that opportunities to observe teachers in another school have been helpful in giving them fresh ideas. Staff are now clearer than in the past about what is expected of them because you regularly remind everyone of the non-negotiable aspects of school practice and of the current school priorities. The work in pupils' books shows that they are given more frequent opportunities to write about an exciting range of topics and subjects and that this is beginning to improve the quality of writing across the school. Plans are in place for specialist leaders of education from Coddington Primary School to provide support and challenge to develop the work of the subject leaders for English and mathematics at Sutton-on-Trent Primary School. Where teaching is strongest, there is evidence of better planning which is beginning to stretch and challenge pupils more effectively. In a Year 3 and Year 4 mathematics lesson, the teacher successfully challenged the pupils to beat their previous personal time score for completing a multiplication square. However, in the main, improvements are too patchy and too slow. For example, pupils now have targets for their English work but in some classes these targets are not challenging enough and the pupils are spending time practising skills which they already have.

You have worked hard to increase the accountability of staff. The teachers are becoming more confident in discussing the progress and attainment of individual pupils during half termly pupil progress meetings which have been in place since last Easter. However, senior leaders and governors are in no doubt that there is considerable work to be done to ensure that all teachers have the necessary skills to assess pupils' learning effectively. Too often, teachers ask questions and check the understanding only of the pupils who are confident to put their hands up and offer the answers.

The school's own information for the last academic year, as well as early provisional results, indicates that the proportions of pupils who achieved the expected standards in reading and writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 in July 2016 was too low. You accurately identify that pupils' progress and attainment in mathematics across the school is of particular concern. This view is supported by the recent national data, which suggests that the proportion of pupils who achieved higher standards in mathematics by the end of key stage two last year at Sutton-on-Trent Primary was also lower than the national figure.

It is a credit to all staff that, during this difficult period for the school, the standard of pupils' behaviour has remained consistently good and that relationships with families are positive. While pupils are frequently not challenged sufficiently in their academic learning, adults do consistently model high expectations of mutual care and respect. Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to successfully support one

another in their learning and this contributes to the strong sense of calm and kindness throughout the school.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I recommend a further visit to the school by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors in the spring term.

External support

The local authority has been central in supporting the acting headteacher in the complex task of beginning to turn the school around through the brokerage of support from the interim executive principal and in establishing links with good local schools. A new programme of support from the current school improvement officer has started but it is too early to assess the impact of this work.

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

Yours sincerely

Clare Cossor
Her Majesty's Inspector