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Dear Georgina Beaven

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Northgate Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- Strengthen the school improvement plan by adding targets for groups of pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and the chair and co-vice-chair of the governing body. I conducted a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. You led me on a tour of the school and provided me with a wide range of the school's documentation to scrutinise. We discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. I met your four middle leaders and they showed me samples of pupils' work. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also examined the school's most recent information about pupils' performance with you and your deputies.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership structure. Two assistant headteachers were promoted to job share the post of deputy headteacher, with responsibility for inclusion. Another deputy headteacher, with responsibility for teaching and learning, joined the school in April 2015. The governing body has been reformed: only the chair and one of the co-vice chairs of governors are still in place. Seven new governors have been appointed and the single remaining vacancy is being filled.

Main findings

You continue to provide strong leadership of the school. You have a clear vision for the high standards expected at the school and have shown determination in pursuit of improvement. You rightly focused on establishing better systems for monitoring the performance of pupils and staff. Leaders and governors now have a deeper and more accurate understanding of the strengths and remaining weaknesses of the school. You have led the school by example and have developed the skills of other leaders well. Leaders' actions are successfully tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

During my visits to classrooms, the atmosphere was purposeful and pupils were appropriately engaged in a range of learning activities. You were able to demonstrate the steps taken to improve teaching through bespoke coaching of individuals alongside whole staff training. The pupils I spoke to explained what they were learning clearly and enthusiastically and were enjoying grappling with some challenging tasks.

The two middle leaders with responsibility for English have benefited from support by an English specialist from the neighbouring Langley Green Primary School. Shortly after the inspection, the middle leaders rightly set out to identify how well reading was being taught at the school. Based on their findings, they raised expectations and delivered training for both teachers and teaching assistants. Staff responded well and now pupils are heard reading weekly and their reading material is more challenging. Importantly, the leaders checked that these steps have taken place consistently across the school. They are now setting out to evaluate the impact of these improvements on the standards of reading throughout the school.

The English leaders adopted a similarly direct approach to improving writing. Following the inspection, they issued a presentation policy which makes it clear how pupils should present their work in books. This policy included guidance about spelling and handwriting. Staff and pupils responded to the raised expectations well. Leaders showed me many examples of work which showed strong improvements in spelling, handwriting and presentation of work.

The feedback given to pupils to help them improve their work is now having much

greater impact. Evidence from books and through talking to pupils shows how they are responding well to the helpful advice given by teachers. The use of 'mid-point marking' to offer advice to pupils part way through writing longer pieces has proved particularly successful. Although there is some inconsistency in the quality of feedback given, in the best examples teachers offer pupils further stretch and challenge, for example by posing questions which require pupils to apply their newly acquired mathematical skills.

The deputy headteacher for teaching and learning has significantly improved the systems for analysing and displaying information about pupils' attainment and progress. School leaders now have a great deal of information, and they need to extract, analyse and succinctly explain what the data is telling them about pupils' progress. Appropriately aspirational targets have been set for individual pupils, who are regularly assessed. The performance of different groups is now being tracked, but not yet reported in a way that shows whether their progress is on track to meet the group's targets.

As headteacher, you accurately evaluate the school's current position. You and your team are rightly proud of the improvements at the school and are clear about the next steps needed to maintain this trajectory. The school improvement plan is well organised and linked closely to the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

Although the plan has useful attainment targets for each year group, it does not yet have targets or milestones for the performance of groups in the school, such as disadvantaged pupils. These would make it easier for leaders and governors to evaluate the success of actions taken to improve the performance of these groups.

You have taken effective steps to develop the leadership skills of your middle leaders. You have reorganised responsibilities so that the two leaders of mathematics and two leaders of English also have responsibilities for teams, such as early years. All four leaders were clear about priorities for improvement and could show the impact of their work taken to address these so far. You also have plans to expand the useful coaching some middle leaders have received from Langley Green School. The mathematics leaders expect pupils throughout the school to develop their ability to reason and explain their thinking. They provided evidence to show how well pupils are tackling difficult mathematical tasks. The leaders insightfully identified that some staff require further subject training to build on current improvements in the teaching of mathematics.

The deputy headteachers who share the role of special educational needs coordinator have seized this opportunity with enthusiasm. They share a clear vision to enable every pupil in the school to thrive and achieve well. They started by checking that pupils' diverse needs and starting points were accurately identified. They are also working effectively with parents and outside agencies to provide the right support for pupils. The deputy headteachers have ensured that assessment information is used to measure the impact of interventions designed to help pupils

with special educational needs and/or disabilities to progress well. They also have oversight of actions taken to help pupils who have fallen behind to catch up.

The governing body has changed significantly. Following the inspection, some governors stood down and only the chair of the governing body and one of the vice-chairs remains. The school commissioned the support of a national leader of governance who provided useful recommendations about the purpose and nature of governance. The chair of the governing body has successfully recruited seven new governors, with wide-ranging and relevant expertise. They are currently undergoing training, and new committees are poised to provide challenge and support to school leaders. The new co-vice-chair shows an astute awareness of how governance needs to develop.

External support

During the eight months following the inspection, school leaders benefited from a useful relationship with the local authority adviser. She offered appropriate levels of support and challenge during meetings at the school. A new adviser from the local authority is now getting to know the school. Immediately following the inspection, the provision of effective extra support for the school was variable. Some support commissioned from the local teaching school alliance had limited impact. However, the support for middle leaders provided by Langley Green School, brokered by the Crawley School Improvement Board, was more successful.

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

Yours sincerely

Theresa Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector