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Mr Phil Webster
Partnership Headteacher
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Dear Mr Webster

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Old Stratford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 February 2016. 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the skills of the teaching assistants so that they have greater impact on pupils' progress during lessons
- ensure that teachers consistently make effective use of time during lessons so that pupils, particularly those who are most-able, make the progress of which they are capable
- ensure that the development plan precisely identifies the staff who are responsible for carrying out improvements so that governors can hold fully leaders to account.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you as partnership headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the leader with responsibility for key stage 1 and the reception class teacher.

I also met with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and the school's website were evaluated. I spoke with pupils in class and more formally with a group of four pupils. I also spoke with parents as they brought their children to school in the morning and I read a letter that a parent had left in school for me. I toured the school with you to see the learning that was taking place in every class and we looked at a sample of pupils' books. I checked the single central record and I considered a report from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has left. You were appointed as a temporary partnership headteacher. You are also the headteacher at New Bradwell Primary School. Three other teachers have left and two have been appointed, taking up their posts in September 2016.

A new chair of governors and vice-chair were appointed in June 2016. They were existing members of the board of governors.

Main findings

Following the last inspection, there was a period of turbulence in staffing at the school. After the headteacher left in July 2016, the governing body, and leaders at all levels, were keen to ensure that effective action was being taken to bring about improvements during this unsettled time. The deputy headteacher wrote an action plan to address the immediate priorities. She met with the governing body to keep them fully informed of the developments that were taking place. She was supported by a local leader of education during this time.

During the summer term, leaders began to improve communication with parents. They introduced regular newsletters and ensured that assemblies and sports days made parents feel welcome. Parents I spoke with were appreciative of the improvements in communication, which you have successfully built upon this term.

The governing body instigated a questionnaire for parents and staff to garner their views about bringing about improvements to the school. The deputy headteacher was ably supported by the key stage 1 leader in reviewing the curriculum. Teachers now plan together in teams and have ensured that learning is exciting and captivating for the pupils. Pupils say that learning 'is now fun' and they appreciate the enrichment opportunities, such as visits to local museums to bring learning to life for them. Pupils have a clear understanding of British values. You have purposefully linked them closely with your school values and woven them into assemblies. Pupils talk knowledgeably about the opportunities they have to understand democracy through the school council. Similarly, through school rules, they understand the rule of law and the importance of tolerance and respect.

Governors know the school very well. They have a very clear understanding of their strategic responsibilities. They have been proactive since the last inspection to secure a headteacher for the school for the start of this academic year. They are fully aware that your post is temporary, already considering the possibilities for the future leadership. They have increased the regularity of their meetings and the rigour with which they check the improvements the school is making.

Instead of teachers taking responsibility for different subject areas, you have chosen to develop leadership at all levels across school by ensuring that teachers are responsible for different aspects of the school improvement plan. This arrangement only started a few weeks ago, so it is too early to comment on how successful it is proving to be. The school's improvement plan sets out clear targets, milestones and criteria for success. However, there is scope to clarify details such as by naming the person responsible for each action, so that governors can sharply hold leaders to account.

Since your arrival in September 2016, you have built upon the work of leaders and governors, by holding meetings with parents to establish a new vision and values for the school. You have skilfully engaged parents and staff so that they feel part of the improvements that are being brought about. Parents I spoke with appreciate the openness with which you have included them in the process of establishing the aims of the school.

Leaders have improved the assessment systems that teachers use to track pupils progress. Being also the headteacher at New Bradwell Primary School, you have used this close link, in addition to working alongside the local cluster of schools, to good effect. Teachers have moderated their assessments of pupils' work with teachers from other schools so that they are now much more accurate. There is still work to be done in this area, which you readily acknowledge, so that teachers are effectively using these assessments to plan work that is just right for the pupils.

At the start of this school year, you introduced a policy for teaching and learning. You have also ensured that pupils have more regular opportunities to write at length. Discussion of pupils' writing is a regular agenda item for staff meetings. As we toured the school, we saw teachers using resources effectively to enable pupils to grasp mathematical concepts. We also saw teachers engaging pupils in their lessons, making learning exciting and enjoyable. However, it was evident that some of the aspects of your policy are not consistently being applied. For example, in some classes, pupils, especially the most able, were marking time while they were listening to instructions and explanations that they did not need. Teaching assistants were not consistently effectively deployed, or using questions precisely enough, to promote learning for pupils. Pupils told me that sometimes the work is easy for them to complete. Pupils' books showed that on occasion they are completing work that they can already do.

You have revised the policy for marking and feedback. Pupils say that they understand the symbols that teachers use. Pupils can point to examples in their books where the information the teacher has given them has helped them to improve their work in the

future. Pupils' books showed us that this is not fully embedded. Occasionally, teachers are not following the policy fully.

The teacher in the early years has improved the environment for the children in her class. She has focused on providing a broad range of learning activities designed to follow the interests of the children. During our visit to the reception class, I saw children who have only been at school for a few weeks fully engaged in their learning and keen to show us both what they were doing. Plans are afoot to improve the outdoor area further. The teacher and teaching assistants are making better use of the assessment system to record and track children's progress.

The website does not meet requirements for the publication of specified information for parents. Although you have improved the website since the last inspection, you have not referred to the latest government guidance on publications on the website to ensure that it is fully compliant. You are keen to address this without delay.

External support

You have capitalised on the strong links you have with New Bradwell Primary School. Teachers have benefited from opportunities to plan together and to moderate their assessments to ensure that they are accurate.

The local authority have offered good support to the school since the previous inspection. They supported the governors during the time of change. Since your arrival, they have undertaken scrutiny of pupils' work, looked at learning in lessons and supported you to ensure that teachers' assessments are more accurate.

Old Stratford Primary School is a member of Fairfield Teaching School Alliance. The local authority have secured significant funding for you to be able to work alongside the alliance in order to secure further improvements to teaching and learning across the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan
Her Majesty's Inspector