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Mark Gilronan
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Dear Mark Gilronan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ottery St Mary Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 November 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 July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- ensure that the system for keeping records of safeguarding and safer recruitment are complete and monitored and evaluated routinely by leaders and governors
- develop the quality of teaching to ensure that achievement improves for all groups of pupils and that any differences in the achievement of different groups are minimised.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your two assistant headteachers. I also met with five governors, including the chair of governors, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Together, you and I visited all the classes to observe the pupils at work and to look at some of their books. I held a telephone conversation with a local authority representative to discuss the

external support that the school is receiving. I spoke to pupils both informally in class and during lunchtime. I also met with a group of six Year 6 pupils. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the single central record and recruitment procedures were checked.

Context

There have been significant changes in staffing since the previous inspection, with a number of new teachers being appointed. At the start of this academic year, the senior leadership team was restructured. The role of deputy headteacher was replaced by the appointment of two assistant headteachers.

Main findings

The outcome of the section 5 inspection came as a shock to some staff. Time was lost in implementing the recommendations from the inspection report because your planned actions to improve the quality of teaching were not introduced quickly enough. However, the appointment of the new assistant headteachers has given fresh impetus to your improvement work and is enabling the school to move forward at a better pace. They are very clear about their roles and have wasted no time in tackling inconsistencies in teaching and learning. While this work has supported some of the improvements in the quality of teaching currently, the previous Year 6 cohort did not achieve as well as they should have given their strong starting points. You and your leadership team recognise that there is still much to do to develop the skills of middle leaders and teachers to secure high-quality teaching in order to raise achievement. For example, results from the key stage 2 national tests in 2016 highlight too many inconsistencies in the achievement of different groups of pupils, including both boys and girls, and those who were disadvantaged.

You recognise that information about pupil progress from test results requires a greater depth of analysis to ensure that there is clarity about the progress of different groups. The systematic approach that you and your assistant headteachers have introduced to check and evaluate teaching and learning in English and mathematics is ensuring that every teacher is now accountable for the progress that their pupils make. The introduction of regular assessments for all pupils is helping leaders to identify where support needs to be precisely focused in order to improve achievement. Leaders are now developing their skills in monitoring and evaluation alongside scrutiny of pupils' work to better evaluate the progress that pupils are making.

Changes to the governing body have resulted in the development of a more pointed and challenging way of working so that governors now better understand how well the school is working. Governors have noticed improvements in the quality of information they receive from you. They have a greater understanding of the way that teachers' performance is managed so that they can assure themselves that

strengths are recognised and weaknesses are dealt with. While governors can see that the school has started to 'turn a corner', they understand that the leadership of teaching and its impact in improving pupils' academic outcomes is central to further improvement.

During our visits to classrooms we noted that pupils were engaged and interested in their learning. This is because teachers have higher expectations of what their pupils can do and now provide work that is more challenging. Improvements have been made to the way that resources are used to support pupils' individual learning needs. Tasks are well planned, particularly for the most able.

You have accurately identified the need to rapidly improve pupils writing skills, particularly the boys, who do not do as well as the girls. Since the start of this academic year, you have introduced a consistent approach to developing pupils' handwriting skills. By introducing a popular reward scheme, boys have started to take greater care in the way they present their work. Teachers are also providing more opportunities for pupils to use their writing skills across the curriculum.

The subject leader for mathematics is keeping a close watch on the progress that girls are making in mathematics. Those girls who have been identified as having gaps in their mathematical knowledge receive extra sessions to extend and develop their skills. Personal targets which are shared with parents are raising girls' expectations of what they can achieve.

Provision in the Reception classes has been transformed. You have developed the learning areas so that they maximise opportunities for children to develop their skills. Personal and social skills are promoted well through a stimulating range of activities on offer. Writing and number skills are developed well, both inside and out of the classroom.

You and your governors have failed to check that safeguarding and recruitment procedures are rigorously carried out. Consequently, aspects of the school's record-keeping and governors' checks on records are not fit for purpose. During the monitoring visit I discovered that procedures to recruit staff were not fully compliant with statutory requirements. Also, a recent financial audit undertaken by the local authority found that personnel files did not contain the required contractual information. You and your governors understand the seriousness of such findings and appropriate actions were taken to begin to address these during my visit. I will make a further visit to the school to check that recruitment procedures and accurate record-keeping are in place and are being monitored routinely by school leaders and governors.

External support

You have been working closely with a national leader of education from Honiton Primary School, who has provided effective advice and guidance for the

reorganisation of the Reception classes. The local authority has provided considerable support and challenge through regular meetings and school reviews. It has funded a comprehensive range of specialist help to support the teaching of literacy, numeracy and provision for the early years. This has worked well. However, more effective support is required from the local authority to secure higher academic standards across the rest of the school and to check that all safeguarding procedures now meet requirements.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector