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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ruth Nixon
Executive Headteacher
Southwold Primary School
Cumberland Road
Southwold
Suffolk
IP18 6JP

Dear Mrs Nixon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Southwold Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2017, 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 May 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that successful strategies that are already in place for raising the quality and consistency of teaching are fully embedded
- improve writing outcomes of current upper key stage 2 pupils, especially the most able, so that their progress is more in line with that of reading and mathematics, ensuring that teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of their writing
- build on the good practice of some leaders in the school to increase the capacity for wider school improvement.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the mathematics subject leader, pupils, a group of governors, including the chair and two governing body advisers, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plans and spent time reviewing school documentation relating to pupil assessment, attendance, performance management and governance. I observed learning in all of the year groups, along with you, and we spoke to pupils and looked at the work in their books.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has faced many challenges. You were not present when the school was last inspected, following which there were many staffing issues. You recognise that some pupils had a varied teaching experience during last year, which undoubtedly affected key stages 1 and 2 outcomes in 2016. Because of staff sickness and maternity leave absence, you sourced teachers in September who were previously known to the school. This move was welcomed by parents who, like you, wanted a more stable start to teaching this academic year. These appointments have been successful and currently remain in place. Since the resignation of a senior leader, you have advertised one permanent teaching position and interviews are taking place shortly. You have also taken on an apprentice, the third in the school's history, and secured effective leadership in mathematics and English across the two schools in the federation. The local authority has allocated two governor advisers who are working with school leaders and governors. There have been some other changes to members of the governing body, including parent, community and staff governors.

As you venture into pastures new, I would like to wish you well in your retirement. You are rightly proud of your determination to ensure that every pupil at Southwold receives the good education they deserve. You have accepted support and guidance from every possible source in order to move the school towards being a good school at its next Section 5 inspection.

Main findings

The school's plans to tackle the areas requiring improvement that were identified at the recent inspection are fit for purpose. They clearly show the actions that have been taken and those that are planned. The timelines are appropriate and there has been no slippage in carrying out the actions. Leaders and governors continue to monitor the impact of the decisions they make, and are quick to respond if something is not working as well as they had hoped.

Pupil outcomes in 2016 have been carefully analysed. Children in the Reception

class continued to achieve well. The proportion of children who reached the expected good level of development was above the national average. Likewise, the proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check was above the national average. Pupils at key stage 1 attained less well in reading than they did in writing and mathematics, where there was improvement from 2015. Progress of some pupils from the end of their time in the early years was below that expected in reading and mathematics. We explored the reasons for those individuals concerned. You and your governors were disappointed with the outcomes of Year 6, especially as key stage 2 outcomes had previously been in line with the national average. Although there had been much turbulence for this year group, you had hoped that the actions you had taken would avert the lack of progress some of the pupils made in writing and mathematics.

As a result of detailed analysis and a recognised need, you have improved the tracking and use of assessment throughout the school. This has enabled you to prioritise where outcomes need to improve for all pupils. Governors and leaders now have a better understanding of how well all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged, are progressing. From such careful analysis, you recognised that problem solving and reasoning in mathematics was not being consistently taught throughout the school. As a result of your actions, and that of your able mathematics leader, the fruits of your labour are now clearly evident. During my visit, children in all classes, from the youngest to the oldest, were involved in solving 'real' mathematics problems. In one class, pupils' names were used to create two-step problems in, for example, calculating how long a pupil spends playing computer games in a year. As a result of your work in this area, it was evident during my visit that the vast majority of pupils are making the progress that is expected of them and very few are currently attaining below the expected standard for their age. However, you rightly recognise that some most-able pupils could be challenged more to ensure that they achieve the best they can, particularly in writing. You also recognise that a minority of pupils still need to catch up with their peers, and effective support continues to be given. The impact of that support, in the vast majority of cases, is clearly evident in pupils' books and in the progress that pupils made last term.

We visited all year groups to see how well lessons are now planned to meet the needs of all pupils. It is recognised that some teachers are temporary and that there may well be changes. You recognise that this will need careful consideration, particularly when looking at how the strategies you have successfully put in place will continue. However, in each of the three classes I saw today, pupils were actively engaged in their learning, eagerly debating, for example, how much taller a dinosaur was than humans! The quality of discussion and the speed at which pupils retrieved the information they needed was impressive, as was the writing that followed from this Year 1 class. 'Some dinosaurs were very big. Seven people high!' wrote one pupil. In another class, during a basic algebra lesson, pupils' thinking was regularly but appropriately challenged by the teacher's skilful questioning. Pupils had devised their own problems for their classmates to solve. 'If there were 66 hats

to be put into six bags, how many would be in each bag?’ Year 2 pupils grappled with this problem, sensitively supported by the teacher: ‘What times table are we dealing with here, Year 2?’ Pupils were quick to use resources and to answer the problem, and also to explain how they could do so in a variety of ways.

During my visit, we talked with pupils about their learning and the support and challenge they feel they are given. ‘Maths isn’t my thing, but I get the help I need,’ said one older pupil. This support was evident during the learning we saw in all classes. Teachers regularly check on pupils’ understanding and intervene appropriately. In the class with the oldest pupils, an engaging comic-strip text was being used to explore how Shakespeare used language. Pupils of different abilities were paired to work together and support each other’s learning. The teacher made good use of showing pupils’ work to the class when, for example, the meaning of words like ‘doth’, ‘harangued’ or ‘feuding’ was debated. However, the quality of pupils’ writing in their books was not as good as it should be and is noticeably different to that seen in younger pupils’ books. There is a lack of care or challenge for older pupils, particularly the most able, which therefore belies their articulate responses in the classroom.

You have done much to ensure that pupils have a better understanding of the part they play in modern Britain. Pupils explain eloquently the visits they have made to places of worship, the religions they have learned about, and the differences in cultures that the curriculum has shown them. They enjoyed the visitor who performed a traditional Hindu dance and have explored foods that various different cultures prepare. You forged a link with a primary school in London in the hope that this would go some way to further developing pupils’ awareness. Although this has not been as successful as you had hoped, the link with a school in Ipswich, and with other schools locally, will undoubtedly continue to benefit pupils at Southwold.

The capacity of the governing body has increased since the previous inspection. The local authority allocated two governor advisers, who continue to work closely with the governing body. As a result, governors, including those who are very new, know the school well, are able to speak knowledgeably about where the priorities are, and understand the impact that recent staffing issues have had on pupils’ outcomes. Monitoring of leaders’ actions is developing well. For example, one governor has been checking on how pupils are progressing in reading and how much they enjoy reading. As a result of feedback to, and challenge from, other governors, further monitoring has taken place to triangulate the findings. This has now provided leaders and governors with a very detailed understanding of how well reading is taught in the school. The monitoring planned for this week will focus on mathematics, following the introduction of a new scheme to further develop pupils’ reasoning skills and deepen their understanding. It is with this informed view of the school that governors are exploring the future of the two schools in the federation. It was clear from the meetings I had with governors during my visit that they have taken guidance and advice from the appropriate personnel, and have come to an informed decision about the school’s future. A new interim headteacher starts with

the school at the beginning of February and governors have taken steps to ensure that day-to-day leadership of Southwold is securely in place. Governors recognise, however, that development of leadership across the school is crucial in order to ensure that the school is judged to be good at the next Section 5 inspection. Governors take safeguarding very seriously and ensure that it is effective in keeping pupils safe. Appropriate checks are made to ensure the suitability of staff to work with children. All staff have undertaken safeguarding training in September, including 'Prevent' duty. The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

External support

The school is drawing effectively on the considerable and effective advisory support which the local authority continues to provide. This has focused primarily on improving teaching and learning, and increasing the school's leadership capacity. The programme has included interim leaders, whose support finished in the autumn term, and establishing an effective link with an outstanding school. The support has enabled you and the governors to prioritise and focus on all of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The new interim leader and current governors now need to embed the new strategies implemented in order to sustain and further develop the improvements made.

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

Yours sincerely

Ruth Brock
Her Majesty's Inspector