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Ms Cathryn Tompkins
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Tompkins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Tor Bridge Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 February 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 March 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 March 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- improve the rates of progress pupils make in the early years and in key stage 1
- review the arrangements for the administration of safeguarding records
- continue the work started to build capacity in senior and middle leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and members of the governing body. There was a discussion by telephone with a representative of the local authority to consider the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and action plans were evaluated. I observed pupils learning in class and looked at pupils' books to evaluate the progress they are making. I met with a group of teaching assistants and reviewed arrangements for the performance management of staff. I also scrutinised records relating to safeguarding.

Main findings

Following the previous inspection, you have developed clear plans to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment which have focused on the areas for improvement that were identified by inspectors.

Your work with staff to align the planning of learning better with the needs of pupils and the expectations of the national curriculum is beginning to show in improved outcomes in key stage 2. You agree that while the proportion of pupils who are on track to meet the expectations for their age as risen, too few are working at the higher standard. In lessons, we observed teachers checking pupils' learning and altering the activities to ensure that pupils have a deeper understanding. However, a smaller proportion of pupils in key stage 1 are on track to achieve the standards expected for their age than in key stage 2. In early years, far more children than in the past are on track to reach a good level of development.

Teaching assistants have had training to help them develop their questioning skills to check and deepen pupils' understanding. Their involvement in assessment, along with the reflection tasks that pupils complete, gives pupils clear 'next steps' in their learning. This is helping to raise standards in all years, especially in key stage 2. Individual teaching assistants have undertaken training in areas for which they have specific responsibility, for example in speech and language development. One teaching assistant is now a qualified 'forest school' leader. Boys and the most able pupils are achieving well through the carefully planned activities in the on-site forest school.

You, and governors, have refreshed your approach to performance management. This is now much more closely tied to the school's priorities for improvement and the increased expectations of what pupils can achieve. Staff training is well matched to equip staff with the knowledge and skills they need to achieve this.

An external review of governance was carried out shortly before the previous inspection. Governors have used this to identify their particular needs, such as a deeper understanding of assessment information and the tracking of pupils' progress. They are holding you and subject leaders to account.

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff know the pupils well and are able to pick up quickly on any safeguarding concerns. Staff and governors' training is up to date. However, the administration of some aspects of safeguarding, particularly with respect to the maintenance of the single central register, needs improvement.

External support

You have been working closely with a national leader of education (NLE) from Woodfield Primary School. The local authority brokered this support through the Plymouth Teaching Schools Alliance. The NLE has arranged for Tor Bridge staff to visit Woodfield to explore strategies that will improve standards at Tor Bridge. The NLE has provided timely advice and guidance. For example, teachers' plans are better matched to support the development of pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics.

Due to staffing changes at Woodfield Primary School, this support has now ceased. The local authority is working with you to construct a package of support which meets the school's current needs.

The local authority has also arranged support for you as headteacher and for middle leaders to help them have a better understanding of their responsibilities and the expectations of this important role. This is improving the accuracy of their assessment and their ability to plan learning to better meet pupils' needs, although there is still much to do in key stage 1.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector