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Mrs Jayne Wilding
Headteacher
Queensway Infant School and Nursery
Queensway
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Dear Mrs Wilding

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Queensway Infant School and Nursery, Thetford

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 2017 with Fiona Webb, Her Majesty's Inspector, 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 September 2016. The inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- follow up with teachers the specific areas identified to improve their teaching, frequently, methodically and with rigour
- track and evaluate pupils' rates of progress alongside the tracking of their attainment
- urgently make the improvements identified in the recent external review of governance.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the leaders of the early years, literacy and mathematics, the chair of the governing body with another governor, and with a local authority officer on the telephone, to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Together with you, we observed teaching and looked at the work on display and in pupils' books. The scrutiny of documents included: the information about pupils' attendance and their attainment; the minutes of governing body meetings; the draft report for the external review of governance; and the school's most recent questionnaire to parents.

Context

Since the inspection in September 2016, one teacher has been on long-term sick leave, one of the early years classes is taught by a higher level teaching assistant and there is a vacancy on the governing body. Shortly after the inspection, the local authority improvement board for the school was discontinued. The school is part of the Norfolk Better to Best programme.

Main findings

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose. The plan shows clearly how the areas identified for improvement will be addressed and is underpinned by the middle leaders' comprehensive action plans. Most of the measures for success rely on raising pupils' attainment. The plans, together with the tracking of pupils' outcomes and the school's self-evaluation information, would benefit from measures for the rates of pupils' progress from their starting points, alongside those for attainment.

Your determination to improve the provision and outcomes for pupils that were identified in the previous inspection report remains clearly evident. Staff understand what you expect and, with guidance, have the skills to improve their teaching. Unfortunately, the pace of improvement at this time is not quick enough to make sure that the school is on track to provide a good standard of education. The reasons for the lack of momentum are two fold; first, you are doing most of the work and there is only so much that you can accomplish in the available time, particularly for first-hand monitoring of teaching and developing the skills of subject leaders; second, the governing body is not yet in a position to play a full part in school improvement.

You lead by example and lead firmly from the front, but you do not have sufficient time or support from others to give staff the help they need to improve teaching and pupils' outcomes quickly.

- Your monitoring of teaching is precise, but not followed through frequently or specifically enough to check that your high expectations are achieved and sustained.
- Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain between and within year groups. Although teaching is planned jointly, the effectiveness of the teaching on pupils' progress is too varied. The good-quality provision for children in the early years is not built upon consistently well into Years 1 and 2, including the teaching of writing and phonics.
- Middle leaders are either relatively new to their roles or not used to the high expectations that you have of their work. They are working hard and are keen to learn, but do not yet have a firm handle on whether pupils make enough progress, how effective the support programmes are or what the best practice looks like.
- Governors are not sufficiently skilled to give you the high-quality support and challenge that they should. They rely on you for information and lack the experience and confidence to challenge pupils' performance. Most governors are new to their roles and do not have a full understanding of their responsibilities. Although they bring a good range of professional experiences and are committed to improve their effectiveness, governors are not up to speed with what they need to know and do.
- The recent external review of governance was very helpful in identifying what needs to improve, but it has taken five months for the review to take place, which does not represent sufficient urgency. Time for developing governance has been lost. Nonetheless, governors appreciate the clear steer provided in the report and from the discussions during the review. There are 30 recommendations in the report. Significant weaknesses were identified, including the lack of oversight of the arrangements to safeguard pupils, the non-compliance of the information available on the school's website and insufficient involvement in the school's improvement.

Notwithstanding the slow rate of progress in some areas of the school's work, there are some notable improvements and strengths.

- Staff morale is high and you have successfully built a team with a shared understanding and commitment to what needs to be done.
- Parental support has improved as a result of closer contact between staff and families.
- Rates of attendance have improved steadily, with more pupils achieving the national average as a result of the high importance placed on attending school each day.
- Improvements in the curriculum are helping pupils to get better at writing at length and solving mathematical problems. Improvements include better opportunities for practical work and for applying knowledge and skills to real-life situations.

- The presentation of work in books and on display is generally no longer a problem because staff suitably reinforce accurate handwriting and neat work.
- Assessments of pupils' work are accurate and sensibly moderated within school and with the help of external colleagues.

External support

It was unhelpful that the local authority disbanded the school improvement board soon after the September 2016 inspection, at a time when you were new to headship and new to the county, when most of the governors were new and inexperienced, and when the school's finances were in disarray. Although the school takes part in the local authority's improvement programme, specifically tailored support has been too little and too informal since the September 2016 inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley

Her Majesty's Inspector