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Ms Mary Shipton
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Shipton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Squirrels Heath Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 2 May 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 October 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:

- extend the school's leadership capacity further by ensuring that middle leaders have the skills they need to make a full contribution to the leadership team
- improve further the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers have appropriately high expectations for pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, pupils, governors and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. Discussions focused on the actions taken by leaders since the inspection and their impact on pupils' achievements. I evaluated the school action

plans and a range of other documents. These included the single central record, minutes of governors' meetings and information about the monitoring of teaching and learning. We discussed the arrangements for performance management. We jointly observed learning in all classrooms.

Main findings

With the support of senior and middle leaders, you have developed a series of initiatives and actions to respond to the weaknesses identified in the recent inspection. Your actions have rightly centred on improving teaching and learning and raising pupils' achievements, especially in mathematics. However, you have also ensured that there is a focus on leadership and pupils' personal development. This has enabled you to plan improvements fully, bringing together staff, governors and senior leaders to improve standards right across the school. You are clear, however, that these are not 'quick fixes' and are determined to make improvements that have lasting impact.

You have strengthened the way leaders monitor the school's performance and evaluate whether it is doing as well as it should. For example, you work with the local authority and a headteacher from another school to observe learning in lessons and look at pupils' books. As a result, leaders have an accurate and up-to-date understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including in mathematics.

The school development plan is comprehensive and provides a clear set of actions to improve pupils' outcomes and maintain their positive attitudes. The plan is well structured and identifies strengths and weaknesses accurately. It defines clear timescales and the criteria for checking whether the objectives have been achieved. As a result, the actions you are taking to improve the school are having a noticeable impact. For example, the school's assessment information shows that pupils are making strong progress in mathematics, and those in Year 6 are on track to reach their increasingly ambitious targets.

One of the reasons for this improvement in mathematics is leaders' thorough analysis of pupils' achievements in last year's tests at the end of Year 6. This analysis showed that, while pupils' arithmetical skills were secure, they fell down on reasoning and problem-solving abilities. You also found that teaching was moving pupils on to the next topic too quickly. This meant that pupils were not able to deepen their understanding and make sufficient progress over time.

You have used this analysis effectively to establish a structured professional development programme for teachers and teaching assistants. This has included a range of activities and initiatives, including visits to another school to observe teaching and learning and coaching sessions. You have made sure that this work is followed up properly so that it has maximum effect on pupils' outcomes. Staff are expected to identify how they will use what they have learned to improve their

teaching at Squirrels Heath. This is sensibly linked to the performance management process. The impact of the professional development programme is evident in teachers' and teaching assistants' secure grasp of their subject, including mathematics. Moreover, pupils' attitudes and engagement are positive, enabling them to make strong progress.

Other initiatives have included the provision of a series of workshops for parents. These have helped parents understand how mathematics is taught so that they can support their children's learning at home. This has also had a broader impact and has helped to improve relationships with parents.

In September 2016, you and your leaders introduced a new system to assess pupils' achievements and identify those who were falling behind in their learning. You rightly decided to replace the previous procedures because they were not working effectively enough. This development is having a positive impact on pupils' achievements. This is because it has enabled you and leaders to provide a carefully aimed support programme for those pupils not making as much progress as they should. It also ensures that you have an accurate and up-to-date picture of pupils' overall progress. This is making a positive difference and, during our joint visits to classrooms, we observed several intensive support sessions for small groups of pupils. These were effective in helping pupils catch up with their peers.

These developments have enabled you to improve the teaching of mathematics across the school, not just in Year 6. The focus on progress and learning has also had a positive impact on the teaching of other subjects, including reading and writing. For example, pupils now make more rapid progress in writing than is found in most other schools. Similarly, the achievements of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are improving.

Over the past year or so, you have dealt successfully with some difficult staffing problems. For example, several leaders have left the school, including all your year-group leaders and a deputy and assistant headteacher. However, you have used this situation constructively to reorganise your senior and middle leadership teams. In my discussions with middle leaders, they confirmed that this is having a significant impact. For example, they mentioned the coaching that the deputy headteacher provides and how useful this is. They also noted that there have been real improvements over the past year. There is now greater consistency across the school, including in teachers' expectations and pupils' progress.

Leaders are involved closely in the monitoring cycle, as well as supporting teachers with their teaching. The capacity of leaders to continue to drive improvement is strong. However, you recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure greater consistency across the school.

External support

A significant factor in the school's continuing improvement is the positive use it makes of external support. With the help of the local authority, it has established a highly effective partnership with a local school. This is providing significant opportunities for leaders and teachers to develop their expertise. For example, it has enabled leaders to validate their own judgements about the school's strengths and weaknesses, as well as check the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' achievements. Without doubt, the support from both the partner school and the local authority has increased the school's capacity for further improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Brian Oppenheim

Her Majesty's Inspector