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Mr John Cooper
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cooper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sandy Lane Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 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:

- secure the permanent headship of the school
- include sharper milestone measures in improvement plans
- check the progress of individual pupils from the end of their previous phase of education
- ensure that mathematics teaching for the least able pupils secures early conceptual understanding through more consistent and effective use of resources.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and three other leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with three members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority. I examined the school improvement plan and other documents, including governing body minutes, special educational needs records, a sample of leaders' monitoring notes and notes of an external review commissioned by the local authority. I considered attainment and progress information for pupils currently in the school. Along with the deputy headteacher, I visited several classes to observe pupils' learning and scrutinised a sample of pupils' workbooks with other leaders.

Context

Since the last inspection, the interim consultant headteacher has left and governors have appointed you as executive headteacher to lead the school initially until July 2018. Governors have appointed the previously seconded deputy headteacher on a permanent basis. Four teachers have left and three new teachers have joined the school. A new chair and a new vice-chair of the governing body have been appointed.

Main findings

Improvement since the last inspection has initially been slow. The interim consultant headteacher steadied the ship after a period of considerable instability in leadership, beginning to develop leaders and eliminating any inadequate teaching. Along with your quick and accurate analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses at the back end of the autumn term, this meant you were able to hit the ground running when you took up your post in January. Since this time, under your decisive leadership, and the partnership with Steeton Primary School, the rate of improvement has accelerated.

You have introduced an effective literacy strategy which is having a considerable impact on pupils' engagement and the quality of their writing. Achievement in writing still lags behind that in reading, but it is improving. This year, so far, progress in writing is good overall, although many pupils, particularly the least able, still have some way to catch up from earlier starting points.

You have revised the approach to teaching mathematics, introducing a scheme that is beginning to challenge pupils well as teachers get to grips with it. Both the writing and mathematics initiatives are improving teachers' knowledge and strengthening their assessment practice. They are increasingly giving pupils work that is just right for them. Teachers are more often using resources to help pupils develop a more secure understanding of mathematics concepts, although this is not yet consistently the case across the school. The progress of the least able pupils remains a high

priority.

Senior and middle leaders are regularly checking the quality of teaching, appropriately making sure teachers are following the school's policies. Leaders are increasingly concentrating on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress. For example, middle leaders scrutinise pupils' workbooks with teachers to identify strengths and next steps in teaching and learning. Leaders know where the strengths and weaknesses are in each teacher's practice. Middle leaders are knowledgeable about their subjects and are giving teachers suitable guidance. As a result, teaching is improving.

Leaders are keeping a close eye on the progress of groups of pupils and individuals, including the most and least able. You have introduced an effective new system for assessing and tracking pupils' progress to help with this. However, while leaders have a clear picture of each pupil's progress from the beginning of the current school year, they do not have a good understanding of whether pupils have made enough progress since the previous phase of their education.

The newly appointed special educational needs coordinator is making inroads to improving provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Each pupil has precise small-step targets and teachers are increasingly matching teaching to pupils' specific needs. Teaching assistants are largely supporting these pupils well.

You have put together a new school improvement plan that identifies appropriate and robust actions and sets an ambitious but manageable timescale for these actions. However, the precise intended learning and progress outcomes for pupils are less clear. For this reason, impact is measured more in terms of what has been done rather than the difference actions are making.

The recent external review of governance made clear recommendations upon which the governing body are acting. Good-quality minutes of full governing body and committee meetings show that governors are asking the right questions and are beginning to hold leaders more sharply to account. The governing body is taking steps to secure the permanent leadership of the school.

External support

The local authority, although hampered initially by uncertainty around leadership and governance, have taken increasingly effective action. The local authority was instrumental in securing the current effective deputy headteacher. It commissioned a robust external review of the work of the school in February that has further helped the school to focus on the right priorities. Leaders are making good use of the effective support and challenge the local authority achievement officer provides.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools

commissioner and the director of children's services for Bradford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Philip Riozzi
Her Majesty's Inspector