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Lorna Button  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Lorna Button

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pebworth First School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 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.

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:

- make sure that checks made on the work in pupils' books are more frequent and rigorous, so as to speed up the rate of improvement
- ensure that the curriculum for English and mathematics promotes pupils' ability to think creatively in the pursuit of deeper understanding in these subjects.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the chair and two other members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Other documents were seen, including records of

checks made on the quality of teaching and information about current pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils' English and mathematics book were scrutinised.

## **Context**

Since the previous inspection, the school leader has left. This post has not been replaced. The governing body has been restructured and a new chair appointed. The executive headteacher retains oversight of both this school and Blackminster Middle School.

## **Main findings**

Governors and the executive headteacher responded decisively to the judgement that the school requires improvement. They have seized the opportunity to refocus their efforts and refresh their approach. As a result, governors are more aware of what is working well and what remains to be done.

Leaders have communicated an ambition that all pupils should make strong progress, regardless of their starting points. In this way, they have made it clear to teachers that attainment could be higher in most year groups. Notwithstanding the fact that most pupils in the school are working at the expected standard for their ages, leaders, rightly, expect more. They know that many pupils could, and therefore should, be exceeding this minimum expectation. More pupils should reach a greater depth of understanding in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders have set clear expectations for teachers to follow about what they want to see in pupils' books. These expectations reflect leaders' increased ambitions. Pupils' progress has improved as a result. Teachers usually, but not consistently, follow agreed procedures correctly. Where they are not followed, the impact on pupils' progress is negative. For example, leaders expect pupils to have to make some improvement as a result of feedback in lessons or written onto their work. Pupils' books show that this approach is working where it is used as intended. However, some books show few actual improvements made in this way because the teacher does not ensure that the school's policy is followed correctly.

On the whole, pupils' presentation of their work is improving and they are using basic skills more accurately. However, this remains a mixed picture. Some work is still untidy. Some pupils' handwriting is neat, while some pupils continue to form letters incorrectly and untidily. Some pupils' incorrect spelling and punctuation persist, while for many these elements have improved.

One reason for this is that some teachers still do not routinely pick up on basic errors in pupils' work. Incorrect spelling is not addressed consistently so mistakes are not always rectified. Similarly, pupils' misuse of punctuation is not tackled rigorously enough in some classes to ensure that pupils securely go on to write more complex types of sentences.

The executive headteacher checks pupils' books for evidence that teaching is improving. She gives appropriate advice where needed and checks whether suggestions have been acted upon. Nevertheless, time available for the executive headteacher to do this is limited by the demands of her executive role over two schools. This factor impedes the pace of improvement and is the reason why the inconsistency in teaching has remained. Staff are seeking ways to make scrutiny of work more routine. They do this by talking to one another about the work in their pupils' books and identifying for themselves what could be done more effectively. This is sensible, given the small number of staff and pupils.

Teachers have focused particularly on enabling pupils to work on their own for longer periods of time. During this inspection, pupils demonstrated they are able to sustain concentration when they are given suitably challenging and interesting tasks.

Training given to teachers has improved their skills in challenging pupils more effectively. As a result, teaching has improved, particularly in mathematics. Pupils are now asked to apply their mathematical knowledge more routinely to help them solve problems. However, pupils still spend much of their time practising and applying skills that they are already familiar with. They are not required to use this knowledge to reason mathematically, think critically and justify their answers often enough to enable them to use these skills securely.

Leaders have identified that the school's approach to teaching mathematics does not promote these higher levels of thinking and reasoning. Leaders have decided to make a substantial change to the mathematics curriculum as a result of their conclusions. They intend to introduce an approach aimed at probing pupils' understanding in mathematics in every lesson, then enabling them to quickly make connections between different elements of mathematical knowledge.

Similarly, pupils learn to write competently. However, their books show that they rarely write with the flair of which they are capable. This is particularly so for the most able. This is because the tasks they are given do not often inspire them to be imaginative or adventurous in their language use. Leaders now plan to review the English curriculum to seek ways of making writing tasks more exciting.

Staff have increased their understanding of their leadership roles. For example, there is a better use of information about pupils' progress to identify aspects of the school's work that need to improve, such as the need to ensure that more pupils write at greater depth. However, leaders are not checking rigorously enough that actions put into place are making the desired impact. That is why the continued errors in some pupils' use of basic skills has not been fully tackled and some teachers do not consistently follow agreed policies.

Governors have rebalanced their focus between securing the viability of the school's future and in achieving necessary improvements in the quality of education now. As

a result, governors now have a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of this school. This is helped by the sharper quality of information they receive and their increasing ability to challenge and find things out for themselves. This is shown by the higher degree of involvement governors have in shaping and evaluating the school's plans for improvement. Governors are now much more actively involved in checking out the school's work for themselves and in asking challenging questions about whether improvement could be quicker.

### **External support**

Leaders appreciate the impact of the recent review of governance on the quality of their work. Support given by the school improvement adviser has led to improving quality of teaching in mathematics. However, leaders feel unsupported by the local authority in their attempts to secure a viable future for this school as part of a federation with Blackminster Middle School.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**