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Ms Alison Marsh
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Dear Ms Marsh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Botley School

Following my visit to your school on 27 September 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 November 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school improvement plan and middle leaders' action plans set out precisely how leaders will measure that improvements are on track
- improve the quality of teaching, particularly for the most able pupils, so that more achieve at greater depth
- further accelerate pupils' progress in all subjects, but particularly in writing, so that more achieve the standard expected for their age
- accelerate the progress of the disadvantaged pupils so that gaps between their achievement and that of their peers diminish more rapidly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the you, other staff who hold significant responsibilities, the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and with a representative of the local authority (via a telephone call) to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. You and the assessment leader joined me as I made brief visits to eight classes. During these visits, I spoke with pupils and I sampled the work in pupils' books. You showed me a range of documentation about the actions taken since the last inspection, including the school improvement plan. I also reviewed provisional results of the 2017 end-of-key-stage assessments and information about current pupils' attainment and progress across year groups.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a teacher with responsibility for pupils in Year 2 left in July 2017. A teacher with responsibility for pupils in Year 5 has also left. A temporary teacher teaches a Year 4 class. Two part-time teachers joined the school in September 2017, one in Year 6 and one in the early years. Two members of the teaching staff have reduced their hours from full-time to part-time. Some subject and phase leaders are new to their roles.

The governing body currently has four vacancies waiting to be filled.

Main findings

You, your governors and senior leaders have reacted purposefully to the inspection findings. All demonstrate wholehearted commitment to instigating improvement and ensuring that pupils receive an increasingly good education. You have made sure that the school's improvement plan is strongly linked to the right priorities. You have set a clear pathway for improvement. All staff, governors and local authority officers have contributed helpfully to the implementation of the plan. Adopting a collaborative approach means that all staff are fully involved in improving the school and have the key priorities at the forefront of their work. However, the improvement plan lacks precise measures for leaders and governors to check that their actions are securing the necessary improvement quickly enough.

Following the inspection, you have wisely revamped the school's curriculum, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. You and other leaders have explored a number of new approaches over the summer term. Now, at the beginning of this new academic year, you have settled on your preferred methodologies with the full support of the teaching team. Leaders have purchased new resources and invested significantly in staff training. They have made good use of external support, including that from the local authority. As a result, the pace of improvement is beginning to gain in momentum this year. Nonetheless, all are realistic, knowing that standards need to continue to rise quickly in order for the

school to be good at its next inspection.

Leaders have successfully overhauled how the school gathers, collates and analyses pupils' performance information. There is now greater attention to looking more closely at the performance of groups. This helps governors, middle leaders and teachers have a clearer view of how well pupils are achieving. Because of your efforts, the school has successfully arrested the decline in some, but not all, aspects of pupils' performance. For example, in 2017 the proportion of pupils who met the standard required in the Year 1 phonics screening check rose, halting the previous three-year decline. Unvalidated information shows that pupils' attainment rose in reading and mathematics, in both key stages 1 and 2, with more achieving age-related expectations. Similarly, standards at the end of key stage 2 in the English, spelling, grammar and punctuation assessment have risen quickly and significantly. In 2017, more pupils achieved the standard expected for their age than in previous years. Nevertheless, as you rightly acknowledge, standards in writing remain too low both in key stage 1 and key stage 2, including for disadvantaged pupils and the most able.

You have worked diligently to improve pupils' quality of learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Teachers are benefiting from an increasing focus on their own professional development. You rightly note that there has been a real 'step change', with teachers now actively seeking to improve their practice. Teachers are making better use of assessment information when planning tasks. Teachers model methods and provide well-considered explanations to pupils. For example, because of careful instruction, in a Year 6 mathematics activity pupils experienced a high degree of success when placing decimals on a number line. Pupils play their part, listening attentively and trying their best. However, the quality of teaching remains variable. Teachers' subject knowledge should be strengthened in order to provide additional challenge, particularly to the most able pupils.

External support

Local authority support has intensified since the previous inspection. Advisers have contributed positively to strengthening the capacity of leaders and improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in English. Subject and phase leaders have benefited greatly from wide-ranging support. Their enthusiasm shines through, with all sharing the view that this is an 'exciting time' to be part of the school. As a result, leaders are becoming more adept at monitoring their subjects and phases, and leading change. Local authority advisers have also made a valuable contribution to whole-staff training, such as leading sessions about the teaching of spelling. Consequently, standards are beginning to rise.

Following a helpful and thorough external review of governance in January 2017, governors are much clearer on how they can support and challenge school leaders more effectively. Governors have conducted a skills review and, as a result, have wisely reorganised their committee structures to better capitalise on their individual

strengths. Work has been further strengthened by governors meeting more regularly with the school's subject leaders. This means that they are better informed about standards in particular subjects. Furthermore, governors' minutes of meetings have improved. Records show that governors increasingly ask more pertinent and appropriately challenging questions about the school's effectiveness. Leaders also share information with governors well in advance of meetings. As a result, governors are able to analyse and consider information in detail. This is helpful as it means that discussions are more focused on the key issues. The quality of governance has come on in leaps and bounds since the previous inspection and governors acknowledge that 'everyone's focus has sharpened'.

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

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Farr
Her Majesty's Inspector