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Mrs A Wilson
Acting Head of School
Heron Park Primary Academy
Dallington Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heron Park Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 16 January 2018, 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to increase the rate of progress in pupils' learning to raise standards of attainment, by:

- ensuring that key documents include targets for pupils' progress and measure the proportion of pupils working at a greater depth of understanding
- ensuring that teachers swiftly implement leaders' recommended development points to improve the quality of teaching.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the regional director of education, middle leaders and teachers to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of the Aurora Academies Trust. I spoke to a group of pupils and reviewed a range of documents

that you provided, including the school improvement plan. You and I visited classrooms to see pupils at work and look at their workbooks. I spoke to parents at the school gate and checked the school's single central record.

Context

Since the last inspection in May 2016, there have been a number of changes to staffing. Most recently, the headteacher left the school in December 2017, and governors appointed you as acting headteacher until the post is filled on a permanent basis. You are supported in this role by the regional director of education of the Aurora Academy Trust. The key stage 2 English subject leader and Year 4 teacher also left in December 2017. The Year 4 class is now taught by two part-time teachers. The key stage 1 English subject leader now leads English across the school. A Year 3 teacher left at the same time and has been replaced by a new experienced teacher. There are currently four newly qualified teachers working in the school.

Main findings

Trust leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve the school and raise standards. You and the regional director of education have a good grasp of the school's needs and a shared determination urgently to bring about the changes needed. Middle leaders are fully behind you and understand their part in making the necessary improvements. The trust has recently increased support, providing useful additional resources to help tackle slow progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

Your action plan rightly has a strong focus on raising standards. You hold regular meetings with individual teachers to discuss pupils' needs and plan additional support where needed. Parents say this extra help is beneficial. However, you only set targets based on the proportion of pupils reaching the standard expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. There are no targets for the proportion of pupils who should reach a higher standard. This limits teachers' expectations. In addition, there are no specific measures to indicate the more rapid progress needed for some pupils to catch up. This makes it hard for leaders and governors to hold teachers fully to account.

You made an accurate appraisal of the teaching we saw on our short tour of the school. You were disappointed by the provision in some classes, but said this was not typical. Your judgement in this is backed up by leaders' monitoring. Although leaders make regular checks on teachers' work, they have not ensured that all improvement points are addressed. As a result, the quality of teaching practice remains inconsistent.

Pupils are keen and motivated learners. Teachers now use pupil achievement information more often to guide their planning. However, work in pupils' workbooks indicates that teachers still do not reliably provide work at the right level of challenge

to promote good progress. Furthermore, pupils revealed their teachers do not implement the school's policies by consistently checking that pupils have corrected their work when asked. This leads to missed opportunities to help pupils improve. You intend to follow this up.

Standards remain too low. Attainment in mathematics in Year 6 dipped considerably in 2017, with pupils' progress being significantly below average. Standards in reading and writing in Year 2 were also below average. There is a legacy of underachievement across the school due to poor teaching in the past. You are acutely aware that pupils need to catch up. You also recognise that too many pupils are still not making the rapid progress needed to reach at least the standard expected for their age.

Supported by the trust, you have introduced initiatives to raise standards in mathematics, writing and reading. For example, there has been recent high-quality training in mathematics, which has inspired teachers to try new methods. You have also introduced a new system to encourage pupils to read more often. Subject leaders speak positively about the new approaches and understand their role in developing good practice. However, it is too soon to fully measure the impact of these changes.

Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They challenge school leaders appropriately, asking searching questions about the improvements needed to raise standards. The inclusion of more specific targets in the school's action plan would support governors in checking the school's progress towards its goals.

External support

In recognition of the school's slow progress to date, the trust has rightly invested in additional training and resources to raise standards. Teachers appreciate the high-quality development opportunities the trust provides. There are also useful opportunities for teachers to moderate pupils' work across trust schools, and for them to network with other teachers to share good practice. In addition, the school is part of a local education improvement partnership, which currently provides additional support to help Year 6 pupils catch up.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the local academy board, the chief executive officer of the Aurora Academies Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for East Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Ofsted Inspector