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Mr Mike McNama
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr McNama

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chester Park Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 16 July 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the refurbished school site includes an outdoor area for the youngest pupils which is fit for purpose and supports them in their learning
- improve the proportion of pupils who meet the required standard in the Year 1 phonics check by ensuring they receive the best quality teaching.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, four middle leaders and four governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the local leader for education and the school improvement adviser, who have been supporting the school. Short visits

to lessons in all year groups were made with the acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher. Work in pupils' books was also examined. Documents were evaluated, including improvement plans, notes of visits made by the school improvement adviser and records from monitoring visits undertaken by the governors. Information about pupils' current attainment and progress were scrutinised. The single central record of recruitment was also checked. I met informally with a group of pupils during lunchtime.

Context

Since the previous inspection in February 2017, there have been a significant number of changes in the teaching staff. This has been due to a very high proportion of teaching staff taking maternity leave and some unforeseen personal circumstances. The long-serving headteacher retired in April 2017. The deputy headteacher, who had already been acting as the interim headteacher, maintained this role until taking maternity leave in February 2018. Since then, the headteacher of Chester Park Junior School has taken on the role of acting headteacher on a temporary basis. He is being supported by the assistant headteacher of the infant school who has been appointed as the acting deputy headteacher.

A major refurbishment and building project began on the school site in September 2017. This has frequently required leaders to close the school for a number of additional days during the academic year. The school serves a local area that has high rates of population mobility. This has a significant impact on the movement of pupils in and out of the school. An increasing proportion of pupils start school at a very early stage of language development and have complex social needs and learning difficulties. A new chair of governors has been appointed since the previous inspection.

Main findings

Despite the significant changes in staffing, the pace of improvement is rapid. You and other senior leaders, including governors, are ambitious and determined to drive and sustain improvements. Staff share your vision. There is a strong sense of team spirit and mutual support.

The school's improvement plan sets specific targets, appropriate milestones and realistic timescales to ensure that the provision becomes securely good. It also shows that you are using your external partners well, including the local authority, to help with evaluating your actions. The regular reviews enable you to compare their judgements on the school's improvement with your own.

Governors know the school well and have a greater understanding of the school's needs. They have received useful training to help them carry out their roles effectively. Governors carry out visits to check on the school's work and to get to know more about the achievement of pupils. They ask searching questions to

ensure that they have a clear understanding about how well the school is performing.

You have taken effective action to improve the weaknesses in teaching by implementing systems and processes to monitor teachers' performance. These systems use a wide range of evidence, such as lesson observations, work scrutiny and pupils' achievement, to identify challenging targets for improvement. These targets are clearly linked to driving up pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, there is greater consistency and higher expectations across the school. You have established a teaching staff that share your high aspirations for the whole community.

You insist on the highest quality of teaching for all pupils. Sessions are carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils from different starting points. For example, you have established a range of ways in which disadvantaged, and other pupils who are underachieving, are helped to catch up. Individual and group work offers challenge and support for them. Other interventions, such as focused teaching in reading or number, also help to develop specific skills. Teachers also ensure that they deploy learning support staff effectively in lessons to help prevent any pupil falling behind in their learning.

Teachers have received high-quality professional development which has successfully supported their teaching of mathematics. The school has also adopted a consistent approach to developing basic concepts, and this has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement. For example, leaders make sure that all staff adhere to the agreed approach to teaching calculation. Classrooms promote mathematical thinking strongly through pictorial and visual displays that exemplify key skills. Pupils are explicitly taught vocabulary. This helps them to express their thinking and apply their knowledge orally, practically and when using a mathematical sentence. Teachers ask relevant questions to deepen pupils' understanding and address misconceptions. You have refined assessment systems, which has raised teachers' expectations for all groups of pupils. Consequently, the most able pupils now have more consistent opportunities to use their calculation skills in difficult activities and to explain their reasoning.

Teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work have improved significantly. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length for a range of different purposes and in a variety of styles across the curriculum. Teachers choose high-quality texts carefully as a stimulus for topic themes which engage both boys and girls. For example, 'The Lighthouse Keepers' Lunch' and the 'The Man on the Moon' provide strong launching pads to engage pupils in their learning. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are now taught regularly. Pupils have a clear understanding of the quality of handwriting that is expected. Teachers use the school's agreed marking and feedback approach, which uses pictures and symbols, consistently. Pupils fully understand this approach, which enables them to recognise what they need to do next to move forward with their learning.

You were justifiably disappointed with the most recent dip in the proportion of Year 1 pupils that reached the expected standard in the phonics check. However, you and your senior leaders have wasted no time in putting in measures to target those pupils who need extra help with learning initial sounds. This includes increasing the number of phonics sessions during the day and ensuring that pupils receive the highest quality of teaching.

Subject leaders of English, mathematics and personal, social, emotional and health education are taking more responsibility for improving outcomes in the specific areas that they are responsible for. They provide training for staff and make regular checks on the quality of teaching and pupils' work. As a result, there is greater consistency in pupils' books.

During the inspection, pupils were fully engaged in a range of different activities and behaving well in all classes. They listen carefully and work well with each other. Pupils are happy to help others learn. Their independence as learners has improved considerably since the introduction of the 'number plate' system. 'C3B4ME' reminds them that, before they go to a teacher for help, they must first look at the board, ask a buddy or look at a book. They show strong perseverance in their learning. This is reflected in their use of the 'Yeti' approach, which means they 'can't do it, yet'.

The temporary outdoor area for the Reception classes created during the refurbishment and building project appropriately meets the needs of the children. You are justifiably concerned that there are no plans to provide an outdoor learning area for the early years children when the building works are completed.

External support

The local authority has provided very high-quality support and a significant level of challenge. This is helping the school to improve at a faster rate than previously. Through regular meetings and reviews, leaders are held to account. Training opportunities and regular monitoring ensure that improvements have been introduced and implemented systematically. The school improvement adviser and the local leader of education know the school very well and provide very high-quality support to both leaders and teaching staff. Their regular visits and the coaching opportunities they provide for middle leaders and teaching staff are supporting their rapid development.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone

Her Majesty's Inspector