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Dear Mr Gould

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Upton Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 19 July 2018 with Jane Johns, Ofsted Inspector, 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. The school was judged to require improvement at its section 5 inspection in June 2015 and July 2017.

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:

- leaders' monitoring is even more tightly focused on pupils' achievement, including that of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
- leaders and teachers raise achievement in mathematics, particularly by challenging the most able pupils to reach the highest standards of which they are capable

- pupils use and apply their knowledge of calculation and number to solve a range of mathematical problems.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher/special educational needs coordinator as well as the English and mathematics subject leaders. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the governing body and the local authority. The school improvement plan, self-evaluation documents and subject leaders' plans were also evaluated. Leaders joined the inspectors on learning walks, which included speaking with pupils and scrutinising work in books. An inspector met with pupils to hear them read. The views of staff and parents and carers were considered as part of the inspection, including through discussions and a review of Parent View.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of new appointments or changes to governance, including a new chair of the governing board. This has provided a fresh impetus for the operational running of the school.

The school has received an academy order and will join the Hamwic Education Trust in November 2018.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and other leaders have shown resilience and determination to improve. In particular, newly appointed governors are now working closely with senior leaders to check the progress of the school. There are clearly agreed and understood priorities through the school improvement plan. These provide a backbone to leaders' work. An example includes the way leaders evaluate how well the implementation of the school's non-negotiables supports improvements in teaching and learning. In addition, all leaders and governors have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. These include for safeguarding, pupil premium, English, mathematics and SEN. This approach is enabling governors to provide rapidly improving support and challenge to senior leaders. It also enables governors to understand the existing strengths and weaknesses of the school. Governors are realistic and told me that they are still 'finding their feet'. A raft of effective training is enabling governors to learn quickly and apply their knowledge in holding you to account for the school's performance. However, leaders' self-evaluation is overly generous, especially in relation to pupils' achievement. For example, despite rising attainment in the key stage 2 national tests in 2018, pupils' progress in reading and mathematics remains a key focus and does not yet represent progress that is strong enough to be judged as good.

You work collaboratively with other leaders. There is a strong cohesive approach to

school improvement, which is reflected in the positive attitudes and high morale of staff. You have implemented key non-negotiables which have been helpful in identifying weaknesses in teaching. As a result, you have targeted effective support and training to start improving the consistency and quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, your monitoring and evaluation is not yet focused consistently well on particular groups, including when tracking the next steps of vulnerable pupils that you identify through your meetings about pupils' progress. This means that some pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and some who have SEN and/or disabilities, are not making the accelerated progress needed to catch up quickly.

You ensure that you hold teachers accountable for their pupils' achievements. For example, appraisal meetings and reviews reflect school improvement priorities. Your non-negotiables have provided a robust and necessary framework to address weaknesses in teaching and to raise expectations. As a result, teachers are being supported and challenged to improve, including in areas identified at the last inspection. You ensure that assessment information is used to identify and target underachievement. For example, a range of interventions are now in place that have had a positive effect on pupils' progress. Pupils write with flair and enjoyment. They often write with a genuine author's intent which is conveyed well to the reader. You have ensured that a focus on grammar has also led to improving standards, including a 16% increase in the key stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling test results in 2018. However, there are some occasions when pupils are not confident in using and applying this knowledge consistently in their own writing.

Mathematics teaching is also improving. You have ensured that focused teacher training and support is well directed. Leaders have completed an analysis of previous test papers and responded to these findings. Consequently, effective training has been put in place to tackle weaknesses in algebra and calculation. Pupils are starting to learn the four operations and methods of calculation, in line with age-appropriate expectations. However, weaknesses persist in pupils' understanding of when and how to apply these skills in more complex problems. There are also a few examples when pupils are not taught the most efficient methods or strategies to help them solve problems most effectively. This is also true for the most able mathematicians in the school and is reflected in the variable challenge seen for these pupils.

You have also worked with leaders to revise the school's approach to reading. Pupils are invited to read more widely and often. Pupils told inspectors that they like using the library more, including when selecting a range of books to enjoy. Other activities include world book day, introducing daily guided reading, and buying particular books for targeted reluctant readers. All these strategies are improving the culture for reading. However, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities continue to need particular attention so that they can make strong progress to catch up.

Finally, we scrutinised records and processes for safeguarding pupils. You continue to promote a strong culture for looking after and protecting pupils. Those we spoke with told us that they feel safe. You take the necessary action and work closely with external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Together with other leaders and well-trained staff, you are diligent and respond well to pupils' needs, which include pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. Governors understand their safeguarding roles and responsibilities well. They complete checks of the single central record and ensure that staff are fully trained in current government requirements.

External support

Following the previous inspection, there has been an external review of governance in November 2017. This has been helpful in identifying key areas to address and focuses governors on the school's priorities. The review has also been instrumental in ensuring governors agree roles and responsibilities to allocate their work for checking the school's effectiveness.

Leaders have also ensured that targeted external support, in particular through the Wimborne Teaching Alliance, has started to improve the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. The local authority has also maintained the deployment of a school effectiveness partner to provide additional support for leaders, including governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector