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Ms Liz Filer
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Filer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Valentine Primary 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 received a judgement of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspection.

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 good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the governing body has an accurate and objective view of the school's performance, so that governors can hold leaders closely to account for pupils' outcomes
- strengthen the focus of senior leaders on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, three deputy headteachers, four of the mathematics leaders and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with two governors and held a conference call with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. The school's action plans were evaluated. I visited lessons with the headteacher and deputy headteacher and spoke to pupils about their work. I also met with pupils from Year 5 to talk about the school and their progress in mathematics. I considered a range of school documents, including the outcomes of monitoring activities and records of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the last inspection the local authority issued the school with a warning notice. As a result of this notice, a review of the governing body was carried out. Several members of the governing body, including the chair, left at this point. A new chair of the governing body has been appointed and two new members have joined the governing body.

Main findings

Leaders have been slow to react to the findings of the last inspection. The school is not on track to be good at the time of the next inspection. This is because outcomes for pupils have not improved quickly enough.

The delayed actions of leaders meant that the outcomes for pupils in Year 6 in 2017 were no better than in previous years. Consequently, results in reading, writing and mathematics remained in the bottom 20% of all schools. Following these disappointing results, leaders have improved the quality of teaching. While this has led to better results for pupils currently in Year 6, other pupils are not yet making as much progress as they could. Until recently tracking systems only considered the progress pupils made year by year. This resulted in weak progress across key stage 2 not being identified in time.

The last inspection found that leadership needed to get stronger. Governors and senior leaders had to sharpen their knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and middle leaders needed to be more effective in their roles. Leaders have made some progress in this area.

Leaders have improved their evaluation of the quality of teaching. Leaders now use a range of information to get a picture of the quality of teaching in each classroom. There are examples of this information being used well to support teachers to improve. However, the support that teachers receive is not yet consistently strong. This is because the monitoring of teaching is not focusing enough on the rates of progress that pupils make.

Middle leaders are now playing a more significant role in the school. Year-group leaders and subject leaders are now having a greater impact on the quality of teaching. For example, year-group leaders deliver effective support plans to other teachers. Also, the newly introduced 'subject ambassadors' support reading, writing and mathematics in each year group. This has increased the expertise and support available to all teachers.

The school's plans for improvement cover all the areas identified for development by the last inspection. However, these plans are not sharply focused on the specific areas that require the most work. Also, the role that senior leaders play in delivering the improvement is not clearly identified. Consequently, it is not clear how the governing body uses the plans to monitor progress and hold senior leaders to account.

The governing body has improved its monitoring of the impact of teaching. Governors now make good use of the information they receive from leaders about the progress pupils make. This means that governors are now beginning to hold leaders to account for pupils' learning. However, governors are not yet ensuring that they are able to accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in the school. For example, the governing body has not taken measures to assure that its evaluations of the school's effectiveness are sufficiently objective and based on hard evidence.

There has been some improvement. Assessment of what pupils know and can do has got better. Teachers now have a more accurate understanding of where pupils are in their learning. They are beginning to use this to ensure that lessons meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils are making some improved progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The recent introduction of tracking pupils' progress from their starting points has increased teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Leaders have successfully introduced a new way of teaching mathematics this year. A wide range of activities has been planned and delivered by leaders to ensure that leaders, governors and staff quickly take on this new approach. Teachers feel well supported by the training they have received. Leaders for mathematics have been identified in each year group, improving the quality of planning and assessment. A governor with responsibility for mathematics has been appointed, and the school has made good use of visits to other schools. Pupils recognise and appreciate these improvements. They can describe how the teaching has improved.

Developments to the teaching of writing are leading to greater progress for pupils. This is seen in new approaches to the teaching of the basic skills that have successfully strengthened pupils' skills and confidence in this area of their work. Teachers provide pupils with helpful feedback and support, in line with the school's policies, that have enabled pupils to improve their accuracy and presentation.

External support

The local authority has provided the school with effective support. It rightly identified the school as needing to improve. Following the notice to improve issued in December 2017, the local authority has provided regular support and evaluations of the school's progress. It has secure plans in place to continue to offer the school expert support during the coming academic year.

The governing body should seek external support to ensure that governors are able to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the school and its staff.

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

Yours sincerely

Phil Minns
Her Majesty's Inspector