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Mr Chris Cannings
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cannings

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castle Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- Improve teaching and pupils' outcomes by:
 - swiftly ensuring that higher- and middle-ability pupils are well supported and challenged in lessons, so that they make consistently good progress across the school
 - following up misconceptions in spelling and grammar in writing lessons.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - school leaders evaluate the school’s new teaching approaches and that these approaches are having a long-lasting impact on improving pupils’ outcomes
 - staff use new systems that support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively to monitor pupils’ learning and progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, middle leaders for writing and mathematics, the coordinator for pupils with SEND, the chair of governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone call was made to the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust (MAT) that the school aims to join in April 2019. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I went on a learning walk with you to every class, where I looked at the work being done by pupils. I checked documents on the safer recruitment of teachers and training for safeguarding.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit in July 2018, seven new staff have joined the school, including yourself as headteacher. There is a new coordinator for SEND who worked two days a week until Christmas and is then to work three days. There are five new teachers: one in Year 5, one in Year 2, one in Year 1 who has a job-share post, one in Reception and one in the Nursery.

The major building work at the school is nearing completion, and three classes from Reception and Year 1 were to move to the new facilities on 21 December.

On the day of the inspection, key stage 2 pupils were singing in two carol services for parents and carers.

Main findings

Since your arrival in September 2018, you have worked quickly to ensure that the school is a more inclusive and cohesive place to work. You have a comprehensive strategic vision for the school. You have reviewed this vision with staff and parents. A simple statement, ‘value learning, value others, value yourself’, underpins the changes made.

You have reviewed the behaviour policy so that it reflects the behaviour of most pupils and not the few who lack self-management. As a result, rewards dominate sanctions. Pupils’ behaviour around the school reflects the calm and orderly atmosphere which you have created. For the few pupils who struggle to behave,

there are clear plans in place to support their individual needs.

There is greater clarity for teachers about the targets they need to meet to ensure that pupils make better progress. You have established a new system for assessing pupils' work. You realised straight away that assessment of the end-of-year tests in key stage 1 was inaccurate. Pupils in every year group have taken standardised tests so that a realistic baseline exists. From this, it is easier to see which pupils are making progress. Consequently, better support is in place for those pupils who are falling behind and there is more awareness of the need to challenge the many pupils of middle ability and the most able. You share the assessment information with governors. Together, you are evaluating what further steps to take.

You have extended leadership in the school. Teachers have leadership posts for core subjects as well as foundation subjects and extra-curricular activities. This distributed leadership provides capacity for you to concentrate on the most critical issues. You know this is important, as there is much to do. The CEO of the MAT provides support to you and other leaders, too. Teachers have moderated work with teachers from other schools in the trust to sharpen their skills in understanding what age-related expectations are.

You have concentrated on improving some of the fundamental aspects of learning for pupils first. You discovered that there were three handwriting schemes in place. Now, the middle leaders in charge of writing have introduced a new handwriting scheme that everyone is following. Some pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are not holding pencils appropriately, so their writing suffers. You are working with middle leaders to make sure teaching of these basic steps is consistent. To improve pupils' reading, especially in key stage 2, you have introduced and modelled comprehension responses to texts so that teachers work more effectively in this area.

With governors, you have improved the security of the site. New fences restrict visitors entering the site during the day. The site manager locks the gates once pupils are in school. In addition, he escorts any visitors who arrive after the start of the day, following communication through the intercom system. You have installed video intercom on exits and entrances.

Speaking with parents at the start of the day, I became aware that you have worked hard to engage with them. You have created a parents' forum so that they can have a say in new policies. Parents appreciate this, and the listening ear which you provide. They feel that they can share any issues more readily. They value your presence before and after school, which makes communication much easier.

The new coordinator for SEND has made effective progress since September. She is an experienced practitioner who has hit the floor running. She has engaged parents in the support of their children. There have been two coffee and tea afternoons for parents to come into school and share concerns together, and with her. Now, every

pupil with SEND has a one-page profile of their needs which the coordinator for SEND shares with staff. She has visited classes to check that teachers and teaching assistants are meeting pupils' needs. She has improved training for teaching assistants and is reviewing training needs three times a year. She has established that pupils with emotional health needs are not supported effectively, and is working with an educational psychologist to improve this.

External support

Since taking up post, you have had two reviews undertaken by the MAT and local authority representatives. This external evaluation has ensured that your own view of strengths and weaknesses is accurate. This helps you plan effectively so that improvements happen speedily and provide maximum impact.

The local authority has included the school in a project with disadvantaged pupils. This will enhance leaders' understanding of tried and tested strategies for improving progress for these pupils and ensure that they spend the pupil premium wisely.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the CEO of the MAT, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bath and North East Somerset Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Maddocks

Her Majesty's Inspector