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Ms Helen Wilman
Interim Headteacher
Abbey Meadows Primary School
Galfrid Road
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Cambridgeshire
CB5 8ND

Dear Ms Wilman

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Abbey Meadows Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, the consultant headteacher, other leaders and members of the governing body. I also met with a representative from the local authority and the chief executive officer of the Cambridge Academic Partnership. I spoke with staff, parents and pupils and considered the 37 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

I visited nine classes with you and we reviewed the work of pupils in their books and folders. I considered various documentation, including reviews of the school's use of the pupil premium, local authority visit notes and your school evaluation and improvement plans.

Context

Since the previous inspection of the school, you have been appointed as interim headteacher. You work closely with the previous headteacher who has been retained as a consultant on behalf of the school by the Cambridge Academic

Partnership. There are firm plans for the school to become part of this multi-academy trust in 2019. The planned admission number for the school has been reduced from 90 to 60 pupils per year for 2018 and 2019. There has been a significant turnover of staff since the previous inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Your and other leaders' determined and well-focused work has led to tangible improvements in the school. You have a clear understanding of what currently works well and what needs to be further improved. The improvements which have been made stem directly from your and other leaders' strong understanding of how to run a school well. You and the senior team combine your own strengths and experiences with those of others who work with the school, such as the local authority, to bolster provision well.

Following a review of how they work, governors now take a more strategic role. They are fully aware of how effective provision is. They use leaders' self-evaluation and improvement plans to challenge and support leaders. Their work has been instrumental in supporting some key changes, such as in the quality of teaching. Governors are also committed to continuing to improve the way they operate. They have undertaken an audit of their skills and are actively seeking additional members to enhance their capacity further.

Since the previous inspection, you have taken effective steps to improve pupils' outcomes. There is now a consistent approach to teaching writing across classes and year groups. This includes providing pupils with the chance to develop their writing skills in subjects other than English. Teachers use their assessment of pupils' writing to guide what pupils do next. This helps pupils to improve their work.

While these improvements are clearly having a positive impact on the way in which writing is taught, there is more still to do. Your approach to writing is used by teachers across the school, but some do not use it as well as you want them to. You know which aspects of teaching writing still need to be enhanced and are in the process of making this happen.

Provisional outcomes in 2018 indicated an improvement in mathematics and reading at key stage 2. Leaders have ensured that there is now a common approach to teaching mathematics. This is logically sequenced and helps pupils to develop an understanding of mathematical techniques, such as addition and subtraction. It is used by teachers across the school. Consequently, pupils develop these skills in a consistent manner. Leaders' work to develop pupils' ability to solve complex mathematical problems remains in its early stages, but this shared approach to teaching underlying mathematical techniques now provides solid foundations on which to build.

In reading, too, leaders have brought in new approaches. However, you are not

content that these are being applied by all teachers as well as you want them to be. Leaders have plans in place to address this weakness in the near future.

Work to improve the wider curriculum is ongoing. At the moment, you have secured a consistent approach to what is taught and how it is taught. Teachers plan together in year teams. This is overseen by senior leaders. You now intend to match the work pupils complete more closely to the national curriculum.

In line with the recommendation from the previous inspection, you and other leaders have put in place an assessment system which provides information for leaders and teachers. This is in a format which is easy to understand and use. Teachers now have clear information on which to base their work. They have begun to use this to decide what support they give to different pupils.

You have been particularly successful in improving the management of behaviour. The school's behaviour systems are usually applied well. Pupils I spoke with confirmed the systems work well and have improved behaviour. Staff and governors were effusive in their praise of this aspect of the school. They describe significant improvements. These were reflected in my observations of behaviour. I saw much good, and no poor, behaviour during the inspection.

Pupils' attendance is also improving. You and others working on attendance are vigilant and persistent, meeting with parents and following up consistently when pupils' attendance is low. Attendance rates are still not high enough but are higher than they were. In particular, attendance has improved markedly since September 2018.

Following the recommendation to improve the quality of the outdoors area in the early years, you have secured a significant amount of funding and acquired professional drawings for the work to take place. This work is scheduled to begin in January 2019.

Governors have commissioned two reviews of the use of the pupil premium. They implemented the recommendations from the second of these, which they felt were most helpful to the school. This has led to some improvements for disadvantaged pupils, such as the provision of extra help in lessons, but it is too early to see the full impact of this work.

You, governors and other leaders have high expectations. You have not been afraid to insist that teachers meet these expectations or to hold them to account when they do not. You have worked with equal rigour in supporting staff new to the school so that they have the skills required to embed your chosen approaches to teaching. The impact of this is seen in the greater consistency of approach across the school.

There is, however, still much to do to improve middle leadership. Most improvement

work is led by senior leaders. Your plans do not demonstrate clarity about how you will secure the improvements in middle leadership identified as required at the previous inspection. This is an area which requires greater focus in your planning and actions.

You have improved the way you communicate with parents by, for example, introducing more regular newsletters, putting more information on the school's website and creating an 'app' for smartphones. This continues to be an area for you to work on. Several parents I spoke with, and a significant minority of those who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, expressed dissatisfaction with how effectively the school communicates with them.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plans are fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action was evaluated following the previous inspection and was deemed fit for purpose.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they continue to implement their plans to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection
- they give more attention in their plans to securing effective middle leadership
- they review and enhance the way in which they communicate with parents so that parents are typically pleased with this aspect of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector