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Mr Tony Lerner
Picklenash Junior School
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Dear Mr Lerner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Picklenash Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2019, 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior leaders and governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plan were evaluated. Together with the deputy headteacher, we visited lessons, talked to pupils and scrutinised pupils' books. I also spoke with parents at the start of the day.

Context

Picklenash Junior School is part of the Federation of Newent Schools, along with Glebe Infant School. The two schools share the same executive headteacher and governing body.

There has been significant change in staffing since the last inspection, in June 2017.

You took up post in September 2017 and the deputy headteacher joined you in October 2018. A majority of the teachers of the six classes joined the school after the last inspection. Many teaching assistants are also relatively new in post.

The structure of classes has also been reorganised. There are now three Year 3/4 classes and three classes for Year 5/6. Almost all the pupils from the infant school join Year 3. In addition, a significant number join the school during the year. There is a rising number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Main findings

Governors reacted rapidly to the criticisms of their oversight contained in the last inspection report. They commissioned a review and have acted on the findings. There has been a very significant turnover of governors and new governors have been recruited with a broad range of skills. New systems have been put into place to monitor the school at key points throughout the year. A new culture of accountability is evident, with regular, open discussion between leaders and governors. Governors are showing a new-found tenacity in pursuing pertinent issues. They also strengthen their understanding of the school with regular visits during the school day. As a consequence, governors are well placed to hold leaders to account.

You have brought fresh energy to the school's drive to raise standards. You have made your expectations of teachers clear and provide them with the support required to reach those expectations. The recent appointment of a deputy headteacher has greatly increased leaders' capacity to monitor the quality of teaching and support teachers. As a result of this increasing momentum, teachers are enthused and keen to develop their skills.

The school's plans for improvement are sound. You have wisely limited the number of priorities and focused on the essentials of raising standards in English and mathematics.

Teachers are now more secure in assessing what pupils know, understand and can do. They are able to diagnose the next steps in learning with greater precision and so plan appropriate work. Pupils are making better progress as a result. This is particularly the case in the development of writing, where pupils are increasingly able to use a rich vocabulary and write extended pieces because teachers are setting work that challenges them.

Teachers have successfully taught pupils to effectively edit and improve their writing. This is having a substantial impact on improving the quality of their work. However, teachers do not consistently insist that pupils proofread their work to check their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Consequently, pupils' work is often undermined by basic errors. This has an impact on the overall standard of their

writing. It even affects the most able writers and so undermines the impact of their otherwise high-quality pieces of writing.

Leaders have introduced a revised approach to teaching mathematics. This is providing a good balance between ensuring that pupils are fluent in basic skills and providing opportunities for them to work out problems and apply their reasoning skills. This approach has only been in place since September, but it has already had a positive impact. It is at its most effective when teachers are confident and secure in their own knowledge and the fundamental mathematical ideas they need to emphasise to pupils. Where teachers are less secure, links between concepts are not always made explicit to pupils and this impacts on their depth of understanding. You have recently introduced a potentially powerful assessment and recording system that allows teachers to monitor pupils' progress and plan the next steps in their learning. The school's initial analysis indicates that while the vast majority of pupils are making good progress, very few pupils who join the school with average levels of attainment are moving towards a higher standard. You believe this is not because pupils are not doing well, but because teachers are cautious in their judgements as they become familiar with the new system. However, you plan to revisit this issue in the coming term and check.

External support

Leaders, including governors, have made good use of the support offered to them by the local authority. Local authority officers undertook the review of governance and have supported governors with the subsequent implementation of its recommendations. This has had a significant impact on the culture of accountability.

You have responded well to the challenge and support of the local authority advisers. You have welcomed the officers' report and made good use of it to improve the school.

You have also sought help from other local groups of schools to support the implementation of the new approaches to teaching English and mathematics. Your openness to constructive criticism and support is playing a significant role in the progress the school is currently making.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lovett
Her Majesty's Inspector