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Mr Chris Luxford
Headteacher
Milton Abbot School
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Dear Mr Luxford

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Milton Abbot School

Following my visit to your school on 8 November 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 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 held meetings with you and the leaders responsible for key stage 1 and 2. I met with parents at the start of the school day. I held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and one other governor. I had a discussion with a group of pupils from key stage 2. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. The school improvement plan and documents relating to the curriculum were scrutinised. Together, we conducted lesson visits across the school to observe pupils' learning.

Context

Since the previous inspection, leaders have restructured the school's model of leadership. The role of subject leaders now lies with key stage leaders. There is also a new teacher in the Years 3 and 4 class.

Main findings

You are providing effective leadership for the school. You and your leadership team have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Together, with governors you have devised sharp improvement plans. Governors monitor the impact of these plans closely. All staff and governors are working determinedly to improve the quality of education.

You have stabilised staffing, and this has enabled you to secure better consistency in leadership and teaching. You provide clear direction. As result, staff know what is expected of them and they feel supported in their roles. Key stage leaders are provided with appropriate training that equips them well for their roles. Staff morale is high, and staff feel that you are considerate of their well-being.

Since the last inspection, leaders have spent a significant amount of time to design a curriculum that is well organised. Staff are excited and motivated about the curriculum. The early signs are that the curriculum is having a positive impact in developing all pupils' knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects, regardless of their needs and abilities. Pupils told me that they feel challenged in all lessons.

Parents and pupils alike are positive about the school. Parents feel that the school is improving rapidly. They are particularly positive about the communication between home and school. Pupils say that there is never any bullying and that behaviour in lessons and social times is positive. They enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their positive attendance.

Over the last year, you have reviewed the school's approach to assessment. The actions you have taken to secure the accuracy of assessment are having a positive impact. This is particularly evident in writing. Teaching staff use their assessment information to plan lessons that build on what pupils already know and understand. This helps pupils to progress well through the curriculum.

Pupils are confident to attempt to use unfamiliar vocabulary to develop their writing. This is having a positive impact upon pupils' sentence structure across a range of genres. The vast majority of pupils write in a lively way for their age and ability. Pupils use the advice they get from their teachers to improve their work. As a result, this is having a positive impact on securing and developing their knowledge and skills.

You have introduced a new approach to spelling across the school that is having a positive impact. Pupils in lower key stage 2 and key stage 1 have secured the required spelling patterns and can use and apply their phonics skills increasingly well. However, this has yet to filter through to older pupils in the school. Pupils' spelling in upper key stage 2 remains weak. Older pupils have not secured the fundamental spelling patterns required to be able to spell unfamiliar words. They

have not yet caught up from their low starting points.

Reading is a key driver in your curriculum design. You have thought carefully about your approach to reading. Teachers have ensured that the texts they use support pupils' understanding across a range of subjects. They link reading literature to their class topic. Pupils say that this helps them with an additional insight into their learning.

Pupils who spoke with me said that reading helps them to develop their knowledge of the wider world. The texts pupils read in school and at home are well matched to their reading ability. Leaders have put in place strong assessment systems to identify any pupil who falls behind. Leaders use this information to provide timely support. Nevertheless, not enough curriculum time is allocated the teaching of reading in key stage 2. Pupils are not given enough time to rehearse and deepen their knowledge and understanding. This hampers their progress.

In mathematics the improved focus on ensuring that pupils have opportunities to develop their problem solving and reasoning is paying off. Pupils have ample opportunities to hone and rehearse their skills in mathematics. Pupils are challenged in a variety of ways and this helps pupils to become fluent in their understanding. When solving problems, pupils can recall upon prior knowledge and apply it to their learning. This is because teachers have ensured that pupils have secured the required knowledge and skills before moving on.

However, further work is needed to continue to improve mathematics in key stage 1, as activities are not always well matched to pupils' starting points. Too often, pupils are completing concepts that they are already secure in. This weakens their progress. Learning is much more precisely matched to pupils' abilities in key stage 2.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Pupils are confident in using resources to aid their understanding. Adults who work with these pupils use effective questioning strategies to deepen pupils' understanding. This supports pupils in becoming fluent in the concept that is being taught.

External support

The local authority provides regular visits to evaluate the school and review the progress against the recommended actions. The school has used specific support and advice from the local authority to improve the school's assessment systems. As a result, the quality and accuracy of leaders' and teachers' assessments have improved markedly.

Key stage leaders are undertaking nationally recognised leadership courses. This is bolstering the school's capacity for continued improvement and helping leaders to

carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

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

Yours sincerely

Matt Middlemore
Her Majesty's Inspector