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Linda Adams
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Dear Mrs Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Surrey Street Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 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.

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:

- build on the progress being made by current pupils in Year 6 so that more pupils across the school make the progress of which they are capable
- strengthen governance by recruiting additional members who are suitably skilled, and nominate a governor to oversee the achievement of vulnerable pupils
- make sure that middle leaders are equipped with the necessary skills to monitor, evaluate and review the quality of the areas they oversee and ensure that subject action plans beyond those for English and mathematics have measurable success criteria
- evaluate the progress made by different groups of pupils when carrying out routine observations of teaching and learning

- sharpen teachers' planning so that the needs of different groups of pupils are more consistently met
- provide strong and ongoing support for pupils in Year 4 as this year group has been identified as requiring well-targeted intervention.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and other senior leaders, middle leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and two headteachers from local schools who are providing support to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I also met with a group of pupils from Years 5 and 6. I evaluated the school improvement plan and reviewed a range of school documentation. Together with you and the deputy headteacher, I visited a number of lessons across all year groups to observe pupils' learning. I also scrutinised the school's single central record of recruitment checks of the suitability of staff.

Context

The school received a pre-warning letter from the local authority in the autumn term because standards of attainment were too low in the 2017 national tests. The school plans to open and run a nursery from September 2018. The number of pupils on the school roll has fallen. Due to financial constraints, a review of the support staff structure is currently under way. A new chair and vice-chair of the governing body were appointed in the autumn term 2017.

Main findings

As a result of pupils' poor outcomes in key stages 1 and 2 in 2017, additional support was put in place by the local authority to secure greater capacity and to strengthen leadership at senior level. Two headteachers of effective schools in the local area have had a marked impact on helping you to make the leadership of the school more strategic in its approach towards school improvement. As headteacher of a school that requires improvement, you welcome and appreciate the coaching role of one of these headteachers, who regularly meets with you to discuss key leadership issues. The other headteacher, who leads an outstanding school, shares the strong practice that is a feature of her school by hosting your heads of year and providing good-quality training on checking that their judgements about pupils' progress are accurate.

The school improvement processes have been improved as a result of support and suitable challenge from the local authority. Milestones have been added to the improvement plan, which means that progress towards achieving targets is able to be measured more easily at regular intervals. The school improvement group, which comprises senior leaders, governors and the local authority, monitors the school's

progress through its half-termly meetings and effectively holds you, other leaders and governors to account.

You have raised the profile of teaching, learning and assessment by sharing the leadership of monitoring this area more widely. You rightly realise that pupils' outcomes are only likely to improve if the quality of teaching they experience over time is consistently strong. Those teachers who also have the role of subject leaders have started to visit teachers' lessons for short periods of time or to conduct longer observations of pupils' learning. You have introduced this task gently, ensuring that they are accompanied by a senior leader when they first visit a lesson. Although middle leaders do not make formal judgements, they now identify strengths of teaching and areas that can be improved. Their experience in conducting these visits is variable at this stage and some middle leaders are more confident in having challenging conversations with their peers than others. Your lesson observation forms do not currently steer the observers to comment in sufficient detail on the progress being made by different groups of pupils over time. Without this additional detail, you are not well placed to identify what teaching strategies are having the greatest impact on improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils, most-able pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Each middle leader has also produced an action plan which identifies key priorities for their area of responsibility. While these plans follow a common format in the way they are presented, further work is required on these plans, apart from English and mathematics, to identify the criteria you will use to measure success. Your judgements on the current quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school are informed by a wider range of activities than was the case previously, including classroom observations, planning for learning, scrutiny of work in pupils' books and regular pupil progress meetings. Pupil progress meetings include the class teachers and their line manager.

Governance in the past has not been strong enough. Governors have failed to ask pertinent questions about pupils' progress and have not challenged the school's leaders sufficiently about low standards. You now benefit from a new chair of the governing body who is a national leader of governance and a vice-chair whose background is in the analysis of data. An experienced headteacher is also due to join the governing body imminently. You are still looking to recruit more governors. You acknowledge that, in the past, governors have not had sufficient knowledge of how to interpret published data about pupils' achievement but you are addressing this by leading a training session on this topic to the full governing body in July 2018.

Your recently introduced data tracking system enables you to monitor pupils' progress more accurately and is understood by teachers, who contribute towards the gathering of assessment information. Teachers plan for learning using this information with the aim of better meeting the needs of the pupils they teach. At this stage, some teachers make more effective use of this information than others.

For example, some teachers plan for learning which features varying degrees of challenge and directs pupils towards an appropriate task which helps them to deepen their understanding and knowledge and make effective progress. However, some pupils are still expected to do the same work as everyone else when it is inappropriate to do so, and this slows down their progress.

You have raised the profile of reading in the school and this has started to have an impact on the quality of pupils' writing. Whereas, in the past, pupils were expected to produce writing tasks within a tight and constrained time frame, they are now given more time to produce longer pieces of writing, with sufficient time to edit and redraft their work. When visiting lessons, I saw some impressive displays which celebrate pupils' writing and I also saw evidence of progress being made when looking at the work in pupils' books.

Pupils' outcomes across the school were poor in 2017 and ensuring sustainable progress in your school is particularly challenging due to high rates of pupil mobility. Your current information on progress being made by children in the early years and pupils in key stages 1 and 2 indicates that progress is steadily improving. This is as a result of more rigorous monitoring, teachers' higher expectations and more strategic leadership. While the strategies you have deployed to secure improvement may not yet secure the outcomes to which you aspire in 2018, you are confident that, over time, a greater proportion of pupils are set to make the progress of which they are capable. You have rightly identified the need to diminish the differences in progress made by disadvantaged pupils in the school and other pupils nationally. You have also correctly identified that pupils in Year 4 have not been progressing at the rate of which they are capable.

External reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium have taken place. As a result of the review of governance, governors have followed the guidance provided in the review. They have redefined the purpose of their curriculum committee so that it focuses specifically on the impact of the curriculum and teaching on pupils' outcomes. An appropriate action plan for governors has been produced. Governors also have a clear role in monitoring the delivery of the school's action plan and evaluating the impact of actions taken. The pupil premium review has resulted in greater consideration being given to the impact of the support provided to disadvantaged pupils. Previously, the school adopted a reactive approach towards these pupils' weak achievement, with too many strategies which had little impact. Now, support and intervention for these pupils are more carefully considered, with fewer support strategies, but which are evaluated more carefully for their impact during the regular pupil progress meetings.

External support

The local authority's school improvement adviser has worked well with the school and attends the half-termly school improvement group meetings to monitor progress and provide a suitable degree of support and challenge. The local authority

has also brokered the effective support of two experienced headteachers, one of whom spends at least two days a week in the school in a coaching role. Local authority advisers for literacy and numeracy have also supported the development of these skills by working collaboratively with subject leaders and teachers. This support is helping to improve the quality of the provision.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector