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Mrs Alison Cornell
Headteacher
Durrington First School
Salvington Road
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Dear Mrs Cornell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Durrington First School

Following my visit with Mandy Gard, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), to your school on 28 and 29 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. Thank you for the help you gave us 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 visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. A monitoring inspection of Durrington Middle School was carried out during the same period.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- analyse pupils' progress in greater detail to determine how successfully different groups, sets and classes are achieving
- make sure all leaders' monitoring evaluates pupils' learning fully and that leaders follow up their checks systematically
- identify, with the help of the local authority, a school that makes good use of information on pupils' achievement for senior leaders to visit.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other leaders, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. You and your deputy headteacher observed lessons jointly with HMI in all year groups across both schools, including Nursery and Reception classes. Inspectors scrutinised more able pupils' writing and mathematics books.

Main findings

At the start of the monitoring inspection, senior leaders reported the school was improving strongly and felt it was on the way to being judged good at its next section 5 inspection. Her Majesty's Inspectors did not find convincing evidence to support this view. There are signs of improvement in teaching but not consistently so. Leaders are not analysing pupils' progress fully to check if it is good.

The Year 2 assessments, last year, improved to average for the first time in three years, with reading picking up strongly. Data analysis, carried out with senior leaders during the visit, showed these pupils made good progress since they left Reception. Pupils in Year 1 did better in the national phonics check than in the previous year, including those supported by the additional government funding – the 'pupil premium'. In other year groups, the school's data shows better attainment and progress in mathematics than in reading and writing.

Senior leaders analyse the information from pupils' regular assessments to some extent but not in the depth required to find out which groups of pupils are doing well and which are not. There is an over-reliance on the average progress that pupils make in each year group when evaluating achievement. Leaders need to check pupils' progress in different classes and sets, to see if there are any marked differences. This deeper analysis would be valuable to put alongside the outcomes of other monitoring activities, such as observations of lessons or scrutiny of pupils' work. It would also provide useful information for managing the performance of teachers, making decisions on salary increases, and holding teachers and leaders to account for pupils' achievement.

Members of the governing body remain determined to play a strong strategic role. Governors rightly ask challenging questions to check that the school is moving in the right direction. They are knowledgeable about the overall quality of teaching, as indicated by the headteacher's monitoring. They need more information on the progress of different classes, sets and groups, to consider whether the picture on the quality of teaching aligns with how well pupils are achieving.

Some aspects of teaching are improving. Greater consistency is developing in how well pupils are engaged in their learning. In Reception classes, children were learning to phrase their own questions, in different ways, motivated by a character

from a story who had 'visited' the class. In a Year 2 class, the teacher had set up an interesting, challenging range of activities to deepen pupils' understanding of fractions. Both the teacher and teaching assistant were phrasing their questions skilfully to tease out pupils' understanding and support them with any tasks they found hard. More able pupils were given the opportunity to apply their knowledge of fractions to tackle harder examples and were kept on their toes with an additional level of challenge. This was in contrast to another lesson, when more able pupils had completed a reading task and were unsure what they should do next. In another lesson, pupils in a mathematics set were gathered on the carpet for too long with only a small number of pupils directly involved in making a symmetrical shape.

Teachers could be aiming for a greater proportion achieving the higher Level 3 by Year 2. Books show that more able pupils are not achieving well enough in writing and mathematics. They are not doing enough extended writing of a high enough quality, on a regular basis. In mathematics, these pupils are not moved on quickly enough to harder work once they have shown they understand a concept.

The coordination of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved since the section 5 inspection but this important area of the school's work now needs good leadership. It is not entirely clear who has responsibility for checking children's progress during the Early Years Foundation Stage and making sure aspirations are high enough as children move into Year 1 and beyond.

The headteacher's judgements on the quality of teaching and learning were accurate on this monitoring visit. The deputy headteacher is still developing her skills and needs further coaching to build her expertise and confidence. Middle leaders have carried out some monitoring tasks. They have started to identify stronger and weaker aspects in the school's provision but they have not followed up their monitoring to check that their feedback to staff is bringing about greater consistency. They have not yet acquired a detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in provision across both schools. This important aspect of leaders' work would benefit from greater rigour so that all leaders have a demonstrable impact on improving pupils' outcomes to good across the federated schools.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

An independent consultant has supported improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This has led to better communication and coordination. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is less assured. The senior leaders would benefit from visiting a good or outstanding school that analyses its data effectively to check on how well different groups of pupils achieve.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector