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Mrs A Thorne
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Thorne

Following my visit to your school on 26 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 visit was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- improve the progress that all pupils make in every lesson by ensuring that:
 - teachers' planning always makes it clear what each pupil is expected to learn, that this is checked at the start of the lesson and subsequently adapted if needed
 - pupils' progress is assessed by teachers against the targets set for each lesson and that each pupil knows exactly what is expected of them, in terms of quality, quantity and depth of work in each lesson
 - teachers maximise the use of other staff to drive learning forward
 - precious teaching time is not wasted on peripheral tasks
 - the acoustics in the hall are improved.
- improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all teachers follow the school's policies, particularly on marking pupils' work
 - teachers are helped to become more reflective about the impact of their teaching on the progress that pupils make during each lesson. This could be

done for example by using video recording and then evaluating what pupils have gained in their learning.

- the governing body firmly holds teachers to account for the progress that pupils make in their lessons.

Evidence

Prior to my visit, you had shared your up-to-date development plan and school progress records. During the visit, meetings were held with you, your deputy head teacher and a visiting headteacher who is working closely with the school. The purpose of the visit was to see the quality of teaching and learning first-hand through joint lesson observations. We saw nine parts of lessons together. The deputy headteacher and the local primary headteacher saw six parts of lessons together. Some teachers were seen more than once in order to see a good range of different subjects.

Main Findings

Of the fifteen joint parts of lessons seen nine demonstrated good aspects of teaching and learning, four were inadequate and the remaining two required improvement. The time has come to take significantly firmer measures to ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good or better. As a group we discussed that the quality of marking and feedback pupils receive about their work, although much improved, still needs to be systematic and adhere in all cases to the school's marking policy.

Common features in the weakest parts of the lessons seen are described below.

- Teachers did not accurately check at the beginning of the lesson what pupils already knew and understood and, as a consequence, pupils did not learn anything new.
- Teachers focussed on the tasks pupils were undertaking. However, they did not follow through from their planning and did not make clear to pupils what they were expected to learn or the quantity of work they were expected to produce.
- When the planned lesson was not working, staff persevered with the planned tasks rather than adapting their teaching in order to use the remaining time to ensure good quality learning.
- Insufficient checks during lessons meant teachers did not quickly spot when pupils were ready to move on, when they did not understand, or work-rate slowed.
- Staff did not keep a close enough eye on what pupils were recording so that some recorded extremely little written work.

- Teaching assistants often spent too much time with individual pupils, who did not need so much help or intervention, when others were left to quietly flounder.
- Too much of the teachers' time was spent explaining and demonstrating so that pupils did not have enough opportunities to think for themselves. Teachers often missed pupils who needed further explanation, which slowed their rate of learning.
- Pupils spent too long collecting and handing-out equipment, which reduced the time available for learning.

In contrast, in the best parts of the lessons seen the converse was true. Most notably the youngest pupils had highly organised activities and therapy inputs so they made at least good progress. Also, when using information, communication and technology pupils were working well independently. Sadly, the acoustics in the purpose built hall are dreadful. It is very hard to hear instructions, and although pupils demonstrated that they were enjoying their physical exercise, the poor quality of sound hampers their progress and attainment. This matter needs urgent attention.

Governors need to ensure that the contribution each teacher makes to raising attainment and pupils' progress is reflected clearly in performance targets and the current appraisal process.

External support

External support has not had the impact intended. You have used educational consultants, provided training and mentored staff. Through your own lesson observations, you recognise that many improvements have been made in the quality of teaching through these approaches and that some of the staff that we saw were not teaching as well as they normally do. However, the inconsistency of teaching over time, and witnessed during our observations, is hindering the chances of the school being able to demonstrate that the education provided is at least good.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector