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Mr Rob Golding
Headteacher
Neston Primary School
Burton Road
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Cheshire
CH64 9RE

Dear Mr Golding

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Neston Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2014, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- continue to develop a robust and rigorous system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning
- analyse the impact of your actions on pupils' progress and report on this every month to your governing body.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also evaluated the improvement plan for teachers, the mathematics action plan, an evaluation of mathematics books and various documents sent to parents and the governors to keep them informed about the action the school is taking to improve the school. You and I visited each of the classes in the school to meet staff and pupils and to look at changes that have been made to the learning environment. I met with six pupils from Years 4, 5 and 6 to discuss their learning experiences and to look at their books.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement, you have reorganised staff responsibilities within the school and changed the subject leadership of mathematics.

Main findings

The development plan focuses clearly on the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. You have kept the whole school community well informed about the progress being made at the school and the community is supportive of the team work going on in the school. For example: after the last inspection you wrote to all parents outlining ways they could support the school and their children: as a result, attendance has improved; however, there are still some pupils arriving late to school.

Staff training on 'what makes a good lesson' highlighted the need for all staff to focus on achievement and staff are more aware of how they manage the teaching and learning processes in their classrooms. You have a clear view of the current quality of teaching in the school; however, the impact of training and the consistency with which developments are implemented is not reviewed as robustly to ensure the impact on pupils' progress.

The learning environment has improved: pupils have accessible and clearly signposted resources so they can choose activities to stretch them. Problem solving has been introduced across the curriculum to encourage pupils to reflect and explain how they reach answers. In the Early Years Foundation Stage there is a new outdoor literacy and numeracy area where pupils were working enthusiastically during my visit.

Following the recent inspection you reorganised the responsibilities of your staff team and have a new subject leader for mathematics. She has undergone subject leadership training; scrutinised mathematics books and conducted some peer monitoring and support. The scrutiny of pupils' mathematics books highlighted examples of good practice and areas for improvement: for example a need for greater consistency in marking to help pupils improve their work and, in some classes, insufficient challenge to accelerate pupils' progress. The recent mathematics training raised teachers' awareness of setting clear achievement targets for pupils based on their ability and the importance of marking books to let pupils know the next step they need to take to improve their work. As a result targets are based on units of work and broken down to meet the needs of individual pupils. The pupils I met showed me their targets and evidence of correcting their work. They appreciate the time to finish their work and reflect on their progress towards their targets.

Examples of good written work are displayed in classrooms and the literacy leader has ensured correct terminology is used consistently to reinforce learning in all key stages. Daily phonic or spelling work is delivered across the school to improve basic skills. Pupils showed me their extended writing and examples of mathematics and literacy skills being taught through other subjects. For example, measuring sticks for creating a Celtic roundhouse and researching the height of New York skyscrapers for a study on King Kong. Pupils I talked to said they really enjoyed the Owl and the Pussycat homework as it had involved family participation: as a result it had become a family memory of learning together.

The governor linked to mathematics is kept well informed of the actions and impact of external support in this area and is better able to challenge the outcomes for pupils. Governors have met with the mathematics and Early Years Foundations Stage leaders this term to discuss progress, strengths and areas for development. Other subject meetings will be held this term to inform the governing body of the work of the school. Governors have improved the recording of minutes so that there is evidence of challenge and response in meetings. They access training from the local authority on aspects of governance: for example data analysis. Governors are challenging the rate of progress and the impact of the actions taken so far: as a result you have monthly meetings with the Chair and vice-chair and newsletters are being sent to governors to inform full governing body meetings. However, the impact of the actions is not always clearly stated in your reports to governors.

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

A representative of the local authority has visited the school twice since your recent inspection and has worked with you to scrutinize mathematics books and produce a report. You have also had support from the local authority mathematics advisor and an independent mathematics consultant. An external education consultant continues to work with the school. She has helped you produce your action plan and has worked with your mathematics leader regarding the development of her role and the analysis of data. You continue to work with your local cluster of schools and have also made links with good and better schools in the area to share good practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Christina McIntosh
Her Majesty's Inspector