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Mrs Gillian Seymour
Headteacher
Commonswood Primary & Nursery School
The Commons
Welwyn Garden City
AL7 4RU

Dear Mrs Seymour

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Commonswood Primary & Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 28 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 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:

- improve the teaching of writing, ensuring that pupils' work is neither too hard nor too easy for them.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, seven members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school action plans, and the school's monitoring and assessment documentation. You accompanied me during visits to several classes in the school, where we observed teaching and looked at pupils' work.

Context

Temporary teachers are working with four classes. This situation has arisen because of maternity leave and long-term absence.

Main findings

The quality of teaching is improving. Your improvement plans are making a positive impact on pupil progress, in particular in writing which was an area of concern during the recent inspection. Despite making good progress, standards of writing in Year 6 are below average. This is due to previous significant under-achievement in the past. Pupils in other year groups are also making good progress, and almost all are on track to reach at least average standards in writing by the end of Key Stage 2. Standards in reading are above average in all year groups. A very high proportion of pupils are set to reach the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check this year. Standards in mathematics are more variable, with some year groups being broadly average and others doing considerably better.

Pupils are making the most progress in Year 6. More able pupils in this year group are working at a high level and teachers are challenging them to extend their writing skills. This is not the case in all other year groups, where teachers' expectations of more able pupils are not as high. The work that these pupils produce is often of a similar standard to that of all other pupils, limiting the pace of their progress.

You have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching across the school. You are making effective use of the local authority's support to improve teaching and are focusing this resource where it is most needed. You are, however, not making enough use of the monitoring of pupils' work to contribute to your overall evaluation of teaching.

Governors are increasingly aware of the challenges facing the school and the impact of your strategies to overcome them. You regularly present governors with an exceptionally clear summary of pupils' progress. This helps to keep governors well informed and allows them to hold you and your senior leaders to account for the work that you are doing.

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

The support provided by the local authority is helping to improve teaching. An advisor is working alongside you to moderate and validate your judgements. In addition, the local authority is providing support to develop the teaching of English, and writing in particular. It has also provided you with links to successful schools.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector