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5 March 2015

Mrs Carole Hinstridge
Headteacher
Summercroft Primary School
Parsonage Lane
Bishop's Stortford
CM23 5BJ

Dear Mrs Hinstridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Summercroft Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2014. 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:

- implement the recommendations from the review of governance and develop a strategy for governor visits that are closely linked to the school action plan
- share the good practice that is evident in some classrooms with all teachers to raise expectations of what pupils can do and so increase their rate of progress
- ensure that when pupils are given a choice of task, teachers explain them clearly and check that pupils are being appropriately challenged
- develop the skills of senior and middle leaders so that they become fully responsible for checking standards and pursuing improvements in their areas of responsibility.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your senior team, middle leaders, members of the school's governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school action plan and documents relating to the monitoring of teaching and learning. I visited every class with a member of the senior leadership team and spoke to pupils about their work. I also looked at a variety of pupils' work in books and scrutinised current progress data.

Context

Since the November inspection one teacher has left the school and there is a new member of staff teaching in Year 5. Although Summercroft is an academy, it refers to itself as a school. The review of governance recommended at the previous inspection was led by Hertfordshire local authority and a full meeting of the governing body to discuss its recommendations is scheduled.

Main findings

Following the inspection in November 2014, you, your senior team and the governing body have responded with a clear determination to make Summercroft a good school. You are an enthusiastic and ambitious team. Some of the changes and new policies that were already in place at the time of the previous inspection have now had time to become more embedded in teachers' practice and are beginning to have an impact on the progress of your pupils. Teachers have started to share good practice such as the use of classroom displays to promote learning. You have also introduced clearer policies, such as a whole school marking policy, since the inspection.

Teachers are now used to regularly recording and tracking the progress of their pupils. More importantly, they are now using this information to identify gaps in knowledge or areas where a pupil needs extra support. Intervention is used to address these issues and is having an impact on progress, particularly in Year 6.

The 'Chili Challenge' system where activities are offered to pupils at 4 different levels of challenge is very popular with pupils and has created a clear expectation that teachers will provide tasks that are appropriate for each pupil. This is increasingly successful at ensuring that work is at the right level of challenge for all pupils. At its best, this approach generated real enthusiasm and led to rapid progress. However, there are still occasions when these tasks are not thought through clearly enough by teachers and so pupils can become confused or choose a challenge that is too easy or too difficult for them.

Examples of pupils using and applying their mathematical skills in problem solving activities were seen in books and in practice with some Year 6 pupils designing and testing out how well paper aeroplanes fly. The profile of mathematics has been raised in the school through the creation of an after school level 6 mathematics club. Following an audit of teacher's skills earlier this term, training has been arranged to make sure that all teachers plan opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in practical situations.

Middle leaders are beginning to understand how to monitor the progress of pupils in their areas of responsibility and are beginning to offer advice to other teachers and then check that this advice has been followed. However, there is still work to be done to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to fully lead their subjects, for example to observe teaching and give effective feedback, to lead training and to develop the practice of others.

Governors have already increased their knowledge and understanding of what good governance is and are more confident about offering challenge to you and monitoring pupil progress. A relationship of trust has been built between you and your governing body because governors are now being given more detailed information about the school and robust discussions are welcomed by you and your senior team. The governing body is looking at ways to make visits into school more purposeful and linked to the school's action plan.

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

Even though it is an academy, the school has now re-engaged with local authority support and is working closely with its improvement partner. The local authority is now leading your appraisal, working with the Chair of Governors, and helping with school evaluation documents. Most importantly, it has brokered an agreement for Summercroft to work with a local partner school to help support improvements in teaching and learning and middle leadership. Although this is in its early stages, you and your senior leaders have already spent a day working with your counterparts at your partner school.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Daniel
Associate Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- For academies [CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk]