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Mr John Micklewhite
Executive Headteacher
Westwood Farm Junior School
Fullbrook Crescent
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Dear Mr Micklewhite

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Westwood Farm Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 4 November 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the local authority school improvement adviser to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I met with subject leaders for science, languages and music. In addition, I made visits, with you, to most classrooms to look at teaching and learning. During these visits I chatted to pupils and looked at their books. I scrutinised English and mathematics books from a range of pupils across the school. I reviewed the school's

single central records of staff vetting checks. I checked parents' responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Context

There have been significant changes in staffing since the last monitoring inspection. Three new full-time teachers and two part-time teachers have been appointed. The headteacher left the school at the end of October 2015 and you took over, as acting executive headteacher, from 1 November for three days a week. This role is in addition to your substantive headship at Birch Copse Primary School. A new acting head of the junior school was appointed and a new assistant headteacher has taken up post, both from the beginning of November.

Main findings

Following my last visit, senior leaders took action to improve their plans for school improvement. Governors became much more involved, and staff were also consulted. This resulted in governors' and teachers' better awareness of key priorities and a stronger sense of purpose. Nevertheless, planning is still not sharp or clear enough to support rapid improvement.

Senior leaders identified where good teaching was taking place, and have begun to use stronger teachers to provide support for those who need it. During the summer term, teachers undertook training about what good standards in the classroom look like. This was consolidated by focused visits to a good school. However, this approach is not yet supported by a wider strategic vision. A piecemeal process and turbulence in staffing mean that there has been limited impact in terms of raising standards of teaching across the board. Our short visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' work revealed a mixed picture. Some pupils are still being given work that is too easy for them. Work in books, particularly in mathematics, is often poorly presented and scruffy, so that it is hard to see how pupils are making progress. Some teachers offer effective and useful feedback to pupils so that they can respond and improve their work, but this is not the case in all classes.

Your very recent arrival and high expectations are starting to build on teachers' growing awareness of what good looks like. You are determined that nothing less than good will be acceptable in the school and are resolute in your drive to root out any weak teaching. Pupils' achievement is now the clear focus for the school, reinforced by your assertion that 'everything is about learning now'. You have a clear set of priorities for improvement and are well supported by the Governing Body and the local authority.

The school's work to help pupils move smoothly from Year 2 to Year 3 is improving steadily, helped now by the new leadership structure. More effective liaison between teachers in the different schools has resulted in pupils settling much more quickly into the junior school. Teachers know their new pupils better. As a result, any pupils

who need additional help are identified more quickly and appropriate support is put in place. Nevertheless, leaders recognise that there is more to do to make sure that information about pupils' learning and achievement is passed on systematically to their Year 3 teachers.

Senior leaders taught Year 6 classes last year, and this ensured much better outcomes in the provisional summer test results. Pupils made good progress overall, and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils was at least as good as other pupils in school and nationally. Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, as well as the most-able pupils, made better progress than previously. The school has recently introduced a new system for tracking how well pupils are doing. Current information indicates that more pupils are now making better progress than previously. However, this varies across year groups as some classes have been affected by weak teaching in previous years.

Subject leaders have, despite the turmoil of changes at a senior level, continued to grow. The head of science has undertaken some well-organised book monitoring and good support for teachers' planning. She is astutely aware of what needs to improve, and her well-targeted plans address this. The recently appointed head of music has a clear strategy for developing pupils' musical skills and abilities by linking music to subject topics, for example, the rainforest. Most pupils now enjoy learning French; the subject leader is working with enthusiasm to ensure that all classes will study French very shortly.

Governors found the outcome of the last monitoring inspection to be a 'wake-up call'. They took this on the chin. An external review of the effectiveness of the governing body was carried out early this term. This has led to a restructuring and reallocation of roles, a new Chair and several new highly skilled members, including a local lead for governance. This transformed governing body has worked extremely well with the local authority to challenge weak leadership and to organise your appointment as acting executive headteacher.

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

External support

The local authority supports the school well. In particular, the support and training given to the governing body has made a significant impact and has helped them to challenge underperformance more robustly. The local authority has brokered your work as acting executive head for three days a week and is offering effective training to teachers. The school improvement adviser knows the school well, and is confident in the capacity of current leaders to ensure that Westwood Farm Junior becomes a good school quickly. The school continues to work well with the local secondary school, Denefield School, using expertise in English, mathematics, and

French to support teachers. External moderation of teachers' assessment is carried out with Bradfield C of E Primary.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Anwar

Her Majesty's Inspector