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Mrs Debbie Grimsey
Interim Executive Headteacher
John Rankin Infant and Nursery School
Garford Crescent
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Dear Mrs Grimsey

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to John Rankin Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 11 March 2016, 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 June 2016. 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the head of school, the assistant headteacher, four members of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. I visited classrooms and scrutinised work in pupils' books alongside leaders. A range of documents were looked at, including the school development plan.

Context

The executive headteacher left the school in December 2015. The early years leader and a Year 1 teacher left last term. You took up the post of interim executive headteacher, for two days each week, at the end of January.

Main findings

There has not been sufficient progress in the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Until very recently, there was no clear plan to tackle weaknesses and little action was taken to improve teaching and learning. As a result, pupils' progress continues to vary and to reflect the quality of teaching in each class. In particular, children in the Reception Year and pupils in Year 1 are not achieving well.

Changes in staffing have meant that key tasks to improve leadership and management have not been undertaken rapidly enough. For example, the external review of the use of pupil premium has only recently been completed. Consequently, there has been limited action to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils and their achievement has not increased. Senior leaders are currently undertaking the roles of some middle leaders because the posts are not filled. Consequently, middle leaders are not involved in checking the quality of teaching and learning or ensuring that the knowledge and skills in each subject area is contributing to pupils' development. Therefore, senior leaders have much to do to bring about necessary changes.

Nevertheless, you have made a positive start in your role. You have set an aspirational tone in the school and raised morale. Both you and the head of school are committed to securing improvements. Already, you have set out your 'non-negotiables' for teaching and learning so that staff are clear what is expected of them. Working closely with the head of school and the assistant headteacher, you are carrying out regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. You have shared your findings with governors and compared them with those of the local authority adviser. Consequently, everyone has an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. You have rightly used this information to draw up a suitable development plan that addresses all of the areas for improvement. You have also ensured that an action plan is in place, based on the recent review, to improve provision for disadvantaged pupils. Even so, these plans are very new and have not yet had any impact.

Leaders are now improving teaching and learning with greater urgency. You have enabled the assistant headteacher to work with individual members of staff each week to improve their teaching. The head of school is currently leading the Early Years Foundation Stage and is helping teachers in the Reception Year to plan better lessons. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this work.

There have been some improvements to communication with parents. Some parents appreciate the opportunities that they have had to find out about what their children are learning about by attending workshops and 'celebration' assemblies. Leaders have successfully communicated their expectations of pupils' attendance. Consequently, absence has reduced. Nevertheless, changes in staffing continue to make communication difficult. A majority of parents still feel that they are not

receiving valuable information about their child's progress and that their concerns are not effectively dealt with.

There have been some small improvements to teaching and learning. Leaders introduced a new marking policy last term. Most teachers apply this consistently. Pupils value the feedback that they receive, particularly the 'stamps' that show that they have met their targets. Pupils' books show that they are taking more care with the presentation of their work.

Effective action has been taken to improve pupils' understanding of safety. Through work in assemblies and anti-bullying week, pupils have learnt about different types of bullying such as cyber bullying. Pupils can explain that bullying is 'when someone keeps on hurting you or saying mean things'. There have also been opportunities for pupils to learn about e-safety in computing lessons and during 'internet safety day'. Consequently, pupils can now describe what they need to do to stay safe online.

Governors rightly recognise that there is much to do to realise their aim to secure a good quality of education for the pupils. To further strengthen leadership, governors acted on the advice of the local authority and appointed a local leader of governance as Chair of the Governing Body. Governors recognise the need to secure permanent high-quality leadership for the school. Meanwhile, they are supporting you in your interim role to make essential changes and to begin to utilise expertise in the federated junior school. Since the inspection, governors have ensured that they have a sound understanding of the progress that the school is making through regular visits and, more recently, by checking pupils' achievement.

External support

The local authority has provided considerable assistance to the school to increase the effectiveness of leadership and management. This has included supporting leaders and securing additional leadership after the previous executive headteacher left. The local authority has maintained a close eye on the school's progress and provided further resources where necessary. For example, the local authority has recently secured an external adviser to accelerate work to improve teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Caroline Dulon
Her Majesty's Inspector