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Mrs Lisa Kay
Acting headteacher
Meadow Farm Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Kay

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Meadow Farm Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 May 2017, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. 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 recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- improve the effectiveness of the leadership responsible for improving the quality of teaching so that rates of progress made by all pupils increase across all subjects
- ensure that leaders monitor teaching more effectively so that pupils present their work neatly and teachers follow consistently the school's policy on giving pupils feedback
- improve the experience of children in the Nursery by providing opportunities for them to reflect on their learning and through enhancing the quality of the outdoor learning area.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the executive headteacher, two subject leaders, the acting chair of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. I considered a range of documentation, including the school improvement plan, the latest self-evaluation document and your most recent information on pupils' progress and attainment. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work. I spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day.

Context

Since I visited the school in March 2016, there have been significant changes in leadership. Following a period of absence, the headteacher resigned her post in October 2016. You were appointed as acting headteacher in October 2016 and an executive headteacher from Springfield Primary School, Spondon, was appointed at the same time. These arrangements are in place until the school's next section 5 inspection. An acting deputy headteacher was seconded to the school in February 2017 and will remain in post until the end of the current term.

Main findings

At the time of the last monitoring visit in March 2016, senior leaders and governors were judged to be taking effective action to tackle the areas for improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. However, the subsequent period of turbulence at senior leadership level resulted in a significant period of inaction and a stalling of progress. As a result, the school spiralled into decline.

Since your appointment, your partnership working with the executive headteacher has ensured a renewed drive for improvement. You are acutely aware of the challenges the school faces to become a good school by the time of the next section 5 inspection.

In national assessments in reading and mathematics at the end of the last academic year, the progress of Year 6 pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, was in the bottom 10% nationally. The progress these pupils made in writing was broadly in line with that seen nationally, but had not been sufficient to make the gains needed to raise their attainment to age-related expectations. Attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 was well below the national averages.

The school's own performance information shows a more positive picture in relation to the achievement of current pupils. However, the range of books I looked at did not confirm this to be the case in all classes. The work in pupils' books indicated that too many pupils are not making the progress they need to in order to reach the standards expected for their age.

Pupils' workbooks are untidy, handwriting is scruffy and the school's marking policy is not consistently followed in all classes. Senior leaders have not been robust enough in checking whether actions which have been agreed are happening in all classes. Consequently, the school is not improving quickly enough.

There is too much variation in the quality of teaching. Teachers' expectations about how much work pupils should complete, and at what level, remain too low in some classes. Teachers do not always have a secure understanding of what good learning looks like. Since your appointment, you have introduced an urgent programme to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement throughout the school. However, you have not been able to overcome the deep-rooted complacency of some staff and, consequently, they expect too little of their pupils.

There are pockets of stronger practice. In these classes, teaching is exciting, precise and unambiguous because teachers have high expectations and share the intended learning clearly with pupils. Any misconceptions are addressed immediately, ensuring that no time is wasted. Teachers keep a close eye on how well pupils are learning during a lesson in order to provide additional support, or add challenge, as required. As a result, pupils learn well. For example, in the Reception class, pupils were using a range of resources to calculate number bonds to 10. They relished the challenge presented by the teacher to prove their answers. In Year 6, pupils were presented with a range of mathematical problems. They worked successfully in pairs to discuss and agree their strategies for solving the problems and explained their reasoning at regular intervals to the teacher.

In the Nursery, children often wander from one activity to another with no clear focus or purpose for their learning. Staff do not talk to children regularly about their learning or support them to think, justify and explain their understanding in order to take the next steps. We agreed that the shared outdoor learning area for children in both the Nursery and Reception classes needs to be tidied, re-organised and improved with new resources to create a more vibrant learning environment where children can explore, investigate and share their learning.

The teaching of phonics has improved due to additional training for all staff. The effective use of intervention groups is supporting any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. As a result, the school's most recent monitoring indicates that pupils are learning and applying their phonic skills more effectively.

You recognise that the responsibility for improving teaching and learning is not widely enough distributed across subject leadership. The English and mathematics subject leaders do not always have the time necessary to observe their colleagues' teaching to identify, precisely, how their teaching must improve to secure the necessary gains in pupils' progress. This needs to be addressed urgently to enable

the school to make more rapid progress and to ensure that all leaders are successfully fulfilling their roles.

The acting chair of the governing body is providing a clear steer, as well as effective guidance and support to new and established governors. She recognises that a great deal of work is still to be done. Governors are keen to develop a better understanding of the school and the improvements that are being made. They have recently strengthened their monitoring arrangements to ensure that they can check on the school's work, including improvements to teaching, more effectively.

While pupils are not always challenged sufficiently in their academic learning, adults do generally model the school's high expectations of mutual care and respect. As a result, the standard of pupils' behaviour remains good.

Pupils who I met with reported that they are happy in school and feel safe. They are confident that should any bullying occur, it would be dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils trust their teachers and other staff to listen to them and to deal with their worries and concerns.

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 school is very heavily dependent on external support in almost all aspects of its work. The school is receiving extensive support from a local authority senior school improvement officer. She makes regular visits to the school and these are helpful in reinforcing key messages. The local authority has brokered an effective partnership with Springfield Primary School and secured the secondment of an acting deputy headteacher. However, leaders on the ground do not always follow through advice and guidance in a sufficiently coherent, consistent or rigorous way to improve the quality of teaching and so raise pupils' achievements. Consequently, they are not able to demonstrate the successful implementation of the changes needed to ensure that the school will become a good school by the time of its next section 5 inspection.

I am copying this letter to the acting chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Derby. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector