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Mr James Geen
Cotford St Luke Primary School
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Dear Mr Geen

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cotford St Luke Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 2017, 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2014, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders' high expectations are consistently implemented in all year groups and in a wide range of subjects
- ensure that pupils in key stage 2 deepen their understanding of number and improve their efficiency when carrying out calculations
- raise standards in writing by developing further pupils' editing skills and improving the accuracy of their spelling
- build on the good relationships with parents, to provide them with the knowledge and skills needed so that they can fully support their child's learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, four members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I observed learning and looked at pupils' work in classes in key stages 1 and 2. I also reviewed a wide range of documentation, such as staff performance management records, health and safety records and reports written by the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2016, a new governor has joined the governing body and there has been a change in the governor who chairs the governing body. There have been very few staffing changes. You have organised a training programme for all teaching staff which is tightly focused on the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The number of pupils on roll has increased.

Main findings

Following the previous inspection, you have rightly focused on improving the quality of pupils' writing and their mathematical skills. Your middle leaders have a clear understanding of what is working well and those aspects that are less successful, and have plans in place to tackle these.

Pupils are making good progress in their writing. Teachers have raised the bar on their expectations of what constitutes high-quality writing. Teachers are planning learning that allows pupils to write in a range of styles, including factual reporting, persuasive writing and stories. Pupils are becoming increasingly confident at using literary devices, such as metaphors and embedded clauses. As the year has progressed, pupils are increasingly reviewing and editing their work. This is a priority in the school's improvement plan but is stronger in some classes than others. Your leader of English recognises that there is more work to do here, particularly in ensuring that pupils improve their spelling. Equally, leaders need to ensure that school policies are being implemented consistently across all classes.

The new scheme of learning in mathematics is increasing the opportunity for pupils to solve problems and think about the application of their mathematical knowledge. They continue to struggle to explain their reasoning and, in some classes in key stage 2, pupils do not select the most efficient method of calculation. As a result, they do not make the progress that they should. Pupils in key stage 1 have a more secure understanding of the concept of number but as your leader pointed out, there is more work to do to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Pupils echoed this.

Staff have led a workshop for parents about multiplication and division which was well received. There is more work to do with parents to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge they need to be able to fully support their child's learning.

The school development plan is an extensive document that identifies correctly the priorities for improvement. However, it lacks the necessary detail to identify how the aims will be realised, who is responsible and the timeframe in which each aim will be realised. Governors are alert to this and are working with you to sharpen the plans so that they can monitor progress more effectively. Your self-evaluation document is generous in some aspects of the school's work. Governors have appointed a new adviser to bring fresh, independent eyes to objectively inform them.

You have ensured that performance management is used effectively to evaluate teachers' effectiveness. Targets are carefully dovetailed to the school's priorities and there is a clear focus on groups of learners, such as those who are in receipt of the pupil premium or for whom English is an additional language. This has resulted in pupils making better progress than at the time of the previous inspection. However, disadvantaged pupils are not making the accelerated progress that they need to.

Attendance has improved for all pupils and is now higher than the typical level seen nationally. However, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not attend as regularly as other pupils.

I checked various records relating to pupils' welfare, health and safety. All staff and governors have had the training they need and those leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding are clear about their roles. Safeguarding records show that staff are alert to signs of harm and act swiftly. They are very clear about the procedures to follow. However, some of the record keeping needs to be sharper, fully documenting all the actions that have been taken. Nevertheless, arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

External support

Leaders are receiving support from the local authority. The Somerset Education Partner visits the school on a termly basis. From a review of the visit notes and discussion with you, these visits provide leaders with a useful opportunity to discuss the pressing issues. The outcomes of these visits are not always providing you with the specific actions which will overcome areas where progress is not as rapid as it needs to be.

The local authority has also arranged support for you as headteacher from the headteacher of an outstanding primary school in the county. This is providing a useful relationship which you are using well to discuss matters and to identify other agencies that can help.

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

Yours sincerely

Iain Freeland
Her Majesty's Inspector