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Mr Steve Down
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Down

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bushmead Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 2018, 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 to 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 September 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 September 2016, 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 for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- continue the work in progress to ensure that pupils are challenged to achieve their potential, including the most able and the most able disadvantaged
- reduce further the remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, across subjects and key stages, by continuing to share and implement more widely the good practice that exists in the school

- make best use of all available learning time, by continuing to improve pupils' overall attendance, reducing further incidences of persistent absence and ensuring that pupils arrive promptly to lessons at the start of the school day.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. In these meetings we discussed the impact of the improvement actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement plans were evaluated alongside the evidence I gathered during the inspection day. I also looked at a range of documents and policies, including information associated with safeguarding and child protection. In the joint observations I made, separately, with you and the deputy headteacher, I took account of the teaching and learning taking place in lessons and spoke extensively with pupils about their work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the deputy headteacher has returned from a short-term secondment in a leadership role in another school. There have been changes to the membership of the governing body, as three new governors have recently joined the team. Three new teachers have also been appointed. One of these teaching posts was created specifically to provide for the increasing number of pupils taking up places at the school.

Since September 2014, the number of pupils on roll has risen steadily, from 225 to 309 in the current academic year.

Main findings

You, your senior leaders and governors have taken decisive action to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You have set out clearly your vision of the journey towards becoming a good school. In doing so, you have established firm foundations for ongoing improvement. Together, you have introduced a range of well-considered strategies that are beginning to raise standards and to secure greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school. Your self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The regular review procedures that you have established are effective in identifying what is going well and the aspects that still need to improve.

The monitoring inspection left me in no doubt about your success in harnessing the commitment and hard work of all staff in reaching your shared goals. The composition of the governing body has been refreshed through new appointments. With your support, all governors have undertaken further training to develop their skills in holding leaders to account. This training has extended their understanding

of the information presented to them about the performance of the school. As a result, they are better equipped to challenge and support you and your leadership team through the planned programme of continuous improvement. This is self-evident in the increasing depth and range of their questioning, as noted in the records of their meetings. Working together, you have continued to ensure that safeguarding arrangements in the school are effective.

A significant area for improvement identified at the previous inspection was to improve the consistency of the quality of teaching across subjects and year groups, in key stages 1 and 2. In our meetings, you described how the deputy headteacher has operational oversight of this aspect of the school's work. Together with the deputy and other senior leaders, you have ensured that weekly reviews of teaching, learning and assessment take place systematically. These reviews include evaluations of the impact of teaching on pupils' learning, through observations of lessons, progress checks on pupils' work in books and a detailed analysis of the outcomes of regular assessments. This is helping teachers to identify more precisely the next steps in learning that need to take place, for individual pupils and for different pupil groups.

Middle leaders are more confident and increasingly taking ownership of the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. This is helping to establish a more consistent standard of raised expectations of teaching quality. The weekly monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment provides individual feedback to teachers on what is working well and any aspects that need to be improved. This model provides valuable information for senior leaders, for example in pinpointing good practice and in highlighting specific themes to support the ongoing professional development of the teaching team.

While expectations are clear, you know that there is more work to do to ensure that pupils, across all year groups and abilities, are routinely challenged to achieve their full potential. This is especially so for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged. While there are signs that the quality of teaching overall is improving, we agreed that the good practice that exists in the school needs to be more widely shared. We also agreed that there is further scope to ensure that all middle leaders have the opportunity to visit lessons across the key stages. This is so that they can play an even greater role in continuing to improve teaching in their subjects and areas of responsibility.

You and your senior leaders have introduced a range of important initiatives to raise attainment in reading, writing and mathematics, by the end of Year 6, and to ensure that pupils make sufficient progress in every year across key stage 2. Although you were disappointed that in 2017, at the end of key stage 2, pupils' combined outcome in reading, writing and mathematics was below the national average, national assessment information shows a trend of improvement on the previous year. It is notable that the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard in reading was above the national average.

Progress information for current key stage 2 pupils indicates that the proportion working at age-related expectations is rising across subjects. Nevertheless, you know that the quality of pupils' writing in Years 4 to 6 is still too variable. Pupils in these groups do not yet routinely present their work using the writing standard expected in national tests.

As a result, there is much work underway to ensure the consistency of pupils' writing presentation and that writing for purpose, linked to whole-class reading and thematic cross-curricular topics, is well-established across subjects. Recently introduced strategies, including specialist training, are also in place to ensure that teachers and support staff are confident in developing pupils' skills further in problem-solving, reasoning and mastery in mathematics. Appropriately, these areas remain ongoing improvement priorities across the school.

Working together with senior and middle leaders, you are building stronger foundations to ensure that that learning for the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is challenging enough to enable them to reach their full potential. The strong focus on the development of an increasingly enriched curriculum that, in particular, develops a love of reading, engages boys in learning and provides a consistent level of challenge for the most able is beginning to pay dividends. This was exemplified in the way that Year 6 pupils spoke with me enthusiastically about their recent, whole-class reading focus on Shakespeare's play, 'As you like it'. It was a delight to read the extracts from their writing, linked to their own interpretations of the play, that they recently presented to younger pupils in an assembly.

All pupils are benefiting from teachers' increased confidence in using the assessment system that was relatively new at the time of the previous inspection. Systematic tracking of pupils' progress plus regular monitoring and review meetings are combining to give teachers more information to help them to match well-focused, timely interventions to meet individual needs. One of the emerging successes of this strategy is reflected in the school's most recent assessment information, which suggests that disadvantaged pupils, of all abilities, are making better progress this year.

As part of your programme of improvement to raise standards, you have also taken steps to develop the support you provide for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Your special educational needs coordinator has introduced new procedures that are grounded in a 'plan, do and review' cycle of learning. Carefully considered learning targets are set in the recently introduced 'pupil passports'. Alongside these targets, specific interventions are agreed between teachers and teaching assistants. The special educational needs coordinator's oversight and commitment in supporting the continuous professional development of class teachers, to accelerate pupils' progress and gain greater consistency in this aspect of the school's work, is impressive.

You and your senior leaders are determined to do all that you can to ensure that pupils attend school regularly and that they are punctual to lessons. Quite rightly, this is so that best use is made of all available learning time. While some of the changes you have introduced are not universally popular with all parents, your analysis of information shows that pupils' attendance is improving, incidents of persistent absence are reducing and fewer pupils are arriving late.

External support

School staff make effective use of the support available to them from the local authority, for example from the information gathered through termly reviews and planned specialist support made available to subject leaders. Alongside this work, local authority reviews, commissioned by senior leaders, include regular safeguarding audits and a planned follow-up on the initial, external, evaluation of the use of pupil premium funding recommended at the previous inspection.

Working together with other schools, through an established local cluster group, teachers are ensuring that their assessments of pupils' progress are accurate and secure. Links with the University of Bedford's teacher training provision support the school's hosting of placement opportunities for trainee teachers. As a result, leaders have been successful in recruiting newly qualified teachers through this route.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick
Her Majesty's Inspector