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Mrs Stephanie Hammond
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hammond

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Luton Infant and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 21 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the links between phonics teaching and pupils' other reading activities to help those with the lowest starting points to catch up quickly
- ensure that leaders know how well pupils are developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in a wide range of subjects
- review the special educational needs (SEN) register to check that it accurately reflects the needs of pupils
- adapt improvement plans so that governors know what they need to check when they visit the school, and provide additional training to help new governors to do this.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Discussions were also held with leaders responsible for early years and mathematics. I met with four members of the governing body and held telephone conversations with a representative of the local authority and an external adviser to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

I visited the majority of classes with you and your deputy to observe learning. We also looked at some examples of pupils' work together. I looked at a range of school documentation relating to the quality of teaching, the work of governors, behaviour and safeguarding.

Context

The current headteacher was appointed in September 2016, initially on a temporary basis. This post was made permanent in December 2016. She had previously been the deputy headteacher. Both the current deputy headteacher and the SENCo have been promoted to their posts internally since the previous inspection. Recruitment is proving challenging, and two classes currently have temporary teachers.

The headteacher closed the separate class for pupils who have English as an additional language when she was appointed. All pupils are now taught in mixed-ability classes.

Three new governors joined the governing body in September 2017. The current chair of governors took up his post in October 2017.

Main findings

Leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching and outcomes for all groups of pupils, especially in English and mathematics. Despite the very low starting points of some pupils, outcomes at the end of key stage 1 in reading, writing and mathematics were at least average in 2017. The proportion of pupils who achieved the 'greater depth' standard at the end of key stage 1 was above average, meaning that the most able pupils had made rapid and sustained progress.

All groups of pupils are making good progress throughout the school; however, those with the lowest starting points are not yet making rapid enough progress to catch up quickly. As a result, outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check remain below the national average. However, school assessment information shows that pupils who have been in the school since the start of the Reception Year do better.

We discussed how stronger links could be made between phonics teaching and pupils' other reading activities to help the pupils with lower starting points catch up more quickly. For example, their reading books should match their current phonic skill level.

The focus on learning to talk about and write stories is strongly evident throughout the school. Current pupils, including the most able, are making rapid progress in writing due to this approach.

The improvements in outcomes have been achieved by bringing greater consistency to the quality of teaching throughout the school. Relationships in classrooms between pupils, and between pupils and adults, are very positive. There is a culture of high expectations and high standards. Adults and pupils all know what is expected of them and they conform to these expectations, for example when walking 'smartly' around the school.

During my visit we agreed that more now needs to be done to allow you to evaluate the progress pupils are making in subjects other than English and mathematics. The curriculum is broad, balanced and interesting. The attractive displays of pupils' work around the school are testament to this. However, it is not yet clear in which areas pupils are currently making the strongest progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.

You and your leadership team have a shared determination to do the best for the pupils in your care. You have strengthened the work the school does with families, and this has improved parents' and carers' perceptions of the school as indicated by a very positive recent survey. These stronger partnerships with families, pupils' greater enjoyment of school and your team's grit and determination have led to improvements in attendance so that it matched the national average in 2017. This is a laudable achievement and now needs to be sustained.

Work to improve the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been delayed by further changes in leadership and staff shortages. The proportion of pupils identified on the SEN register is too high. It is clear that many children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are below those typical for their age, or speak English as an additional language. However, this does not in itself mean they have a special educational need. The new SENCo is starting to tackle this historical situation. This will help ensure that pupils who do have SEN and/or disabilities receive the interventions they personally need rather than just being assigned to programmes that currently exist.

School improvement planning and self-evaluation are much improved. The improvement plan itself is focused on the correct things and has clear milestones and targets to achieve. However, the plan does not explain how governors will check if planned improvements have been successful. A greater focus also needs to be given to subjects other than English and mathematics.

There have been a number of recent changes in governance. Governors have the skills necessary to both support and challenge leaders appropriately. Some newer governors will require further training on how to do this and how to monitor the improvements being made.

External support

The local authority originally brokered external support for the school from the Compass Partnership of Schools in Greenwich. You have continued to purchase this support, meaning that the chief executive officer of the partnership visits the school six times a year to work with you. This has been instrumental and highly successful in supporting and challenging you and other leaders to make the improvements necessary. It has also led to a dramatic improvement in the school's indoor environment that makes it far more conducive to learning. Teachers have had opportunities to visit other schools to learn from outstanding practitioners. You, other leaders and teachers have then worked hard to apply your learning from these visits to the context of Luton Infant and Nursery School.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby
Her Majesty's Inspector