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Miss Donna Shave
Executive Headteacher
Parsons Down Infant School
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Berkshire
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Dear Miss Shave

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Parsons Down Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 17 April 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 good.

The school should take further action to:

- develop the school's assessment system to check pupils' progress across subjects other than English and mathematics
- ensure that teachers' planning precisely matches the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are not currently at the expected standard for their age
- make sure that the quality of teaching in writing continues to improve in order for pupils to make the best possible progress, particularly in Year 2.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, your head of school, your leader of phonics, middle leaders and the local authority school improvement adviser, and spoke with the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited lessons to observe learning in classes with leaders and looked at work in pupils' books. I spoke with pupils during lessons. I considered a wide range of evidence provided by leaders, including information regarding pupils' progress, the governing body's minutes of meetings and local authority visit reports. I reviewed and evaluated plans to improve the school and examined the school's single central record of recruitment checks on staff working in the school.

Context

A new head of school joined the school in January 2017. Leaders have appointed a new class teacher since the previous inspection. Two new governors have joined the governing body.

Main findings

You continue to provide strong and effective leadership to the school and its community. This has been instrumental in moving the school forward. Staff share your determination to enable every pupil in the school to achieve well and are committed to improving the school. Governors, staff and the local authority are positive about the impact that leaders have had on the school.

Leaders know their school well. Plans for improvement are appropriate and leaders are clear about what success will look like. As a result, leaders' actions are successfully tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Governors have responded swiftly to the findings of the previous inspection. They have raised their expectations and developed their expertise. This has enabled governors to hold leaders to account for the work of the school. Governors have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are aware of the work that needs to be done in order for the school to become good.

During my visits to classrooms, the atmosphere was calm and pupils were focused on their learning activities. The learning environment and teaching strategies were consistent across the classes. Pupils know what they are learning in lessons and, perhaps more importantly, can articulate why. They are able to talk confidently about the progress that they have made in their learning in English and mathematics.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have increased significantly since the previous inspection. They understand most pupils' needs well and use their knowledge of what pupils can already do to help them plan challenging learning activities. Because of this, most-able pupils are now performing well across the school in English and mathematics. However, in contrast to this, the level of

challenge set for lower-attaining pupils is sometimes too high. When this is the case, pupils develop misconceptions in their learning and their progress is slowed.

Pupils' outcomes in reading and mathematics in 2017 demonstrate how the school is improving. Headline measures in reading at key stage 1 improved from the previous year, along with the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Although leaders were disappointed by pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check and in key stage 1 writing, they have acted quickly to ensure that these outcomes improve. The school's internal data and work in pupils' books demonstrate that pupils' outcomes in both phonics and writing have improved this year. However, pupils' progress and attainment in writing still fall behind those in reading and mathematics.

Recently developed assessment systems in English and mathematics enable teachers to correctly identify pupils at risk of falling behind. Timely interventions are used well to support these pupils to catch up quickly. Consequently, in 2017, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils in the school reduced. However, leaders rightly acknowledge that there is still work to do in this area to ensure that gaps between these groups of pupils continue to diminish.

The quality of pupils' work in subjects other than English and mathematics has improved greatly. A recent review of the curriculum has ensured that pupils receive a rich curriculum which enables them to develop their skills across a wide range of subjects, including religious education and computing. As with English and mathematics, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve in these subjects have increased. This is beginning to have an impact on pupils' progress across the curriculum. However, the standard of pupils' work still remains lower in subjects outside of English and mathematics. Leaders know that tracking and improving pupils' progress in subjects other than English and mathematics need further development.

Middle leadership has developed at a rapid rate since the previous inspection. Working as an effective team, middle leaders have improved the systems for the monitoring of teaching and learning across their departments and can talk about the impact that their actions have had on pupils' outcomes. A review of some pupils' work in mathematics showed how the actions taken by the mathematics coordinator to raise the profile of the subject in Year 1 have had a positive impact. Middle leaders are held robustly to account for their areas of responsibility and play a key part in ensuring that improvements are made across the school. They are aware of the work that is needed to secure ongoing improvement.

External support

Governors, school leaders and teachers value the support and challenge that they have received from the local authority. Advisers from West Berkshire local authority have provided timely and focused support to leaders in all aspects of the school's work. The local authority is having a positive impact on the school and its journey of improvement.

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. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Emma Sanderson
Her Majesty's Inspector