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Susan Preston
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Dear Mrs Preston

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gillingham Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 July 2018 with Tracy French, Ofsted Inspector, 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 that 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement in May 2014.

Senior leaders and governors are not 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 ensure that:

- systems and processes rigorously track pupils' progress with precise and measurable next steps in order to raise achievement quickly
- leaders focus on pupils' outcomes when monitoring and follow up their findings promptly and with increased urgency
- teachers make best use of assessment information to plan the right next steps in pupils' learning, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special

educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, including the deputy headteacher and English subject leader to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the governing board. The views of the local authority were also taken into account. An inspector spoke with some parents at the start of the inspection. Inspectors visited classes and observed teaching in classes from Years 1 to 6, including the enhanced provision for SEN. Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning and experience of school throughout the inspection. Samples of pupils' work in books were also assessed with a focus in this inspection on mathematics. The school's monitoring records, action plans and summary self-evaluation (SEF) were evaluated.

The school's safeguarding arrangements, including the single central record, were also evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in governance. In particular, there have been four different chairs of governors, including one in an acting position. The current chair of governors took over this role in September 2017. There have been few changes to staffing. The most prominent change being the appointment of the current deputy headteacher in November 2016, who also took on the role of mathematics subject leader.

Main findings

Leaders have not taken the right actions quickly enough to address the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Efforts to improve the school have been hampered by changes to governance. In addition, leaders are taking too long to implement the right actions to rapidly improve the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, despite some more recent improvements during this academic year, pupils' achievement remains too variable, including for vulnerable pupils such as disadvantaged pupils or those who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is something that you acknowledge through your own self-evaluation, which is honest and accurate.

You have undertaken some work to tackle weaknesses in leadership and management. You have reviewed job descriptions so that leaders now have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Leaders also monitor their subjects or areas of responsibility. They work with link governors to evaluate the quality of teaching. However, the school's processes and systems for tracking pupils' progress

are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, you use pupil progress meetings to identify vulnerable pupils, but pupils' next steps for improvement are not sufficiently precise, timed or measurable in holding others to account. This leads to too few pupils making the strong gains required to close gaps in pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

In addition, leaders at all levels do not concentrate well enough on pupils' outcomes when undertaking monitoring and evaluation activities. For example, leaders typically complete observations with some descriptions of teaching strategies or initiatives. Leaders do not sufficiently consider pupils' achievement, or track groups and individuals in terms of their outcomes well enough. Consequently, there is insufficient detail about the learning and progress of pupils, including vulnerable individuals or groups. Leaders and teachers are then slow to react to the evolving needs of pupils in order to help them make the good progress needed. Furthermore, leaders are still sometimes too slow to undertake any necessary follow-up activities if weaknesses are found. This acts as another barrier to raising pupils' achievement speedily.

Middle leaders do not yet contribute effectively to school self-evaluation and improvement planning. However, there are some examples where pupils are being well supported to do well. These include the effectiveness of targeted support for pupils in the enhanced SEN provision and those pupils who have benefited from recent interventions, including in mathematics. Case studies show that where leaders and teachers are using individual plans with clearly timed and measurable expectations, these enable pupils to make rapid progress over short periods of time. This practice is not applied widely though, which limits the progress of others.

You and other staff have positive relationships with current governors. Over time, governance has not been effective in holding leaders to account for the rate of improvement in the school. The changes on the governing body have also led to interruptions or distractions from school priorities. However, since September 2017, following the appointment of the current chair of the governing board, governors are beginning to work more effectively. For example, following a skills audit, governors have been allocated specific roles and are completing visits in line with priorities on the school development plan. This is providing them with some useful first-hand knowledge of the school's effectiveness. As a result, governors have an accurate assessment of the school's overall effectiveness, reflected in the school's self-evaluation form SEF. However, these improvements have taken too long and are still evolving. Governors' work is not yet focused sharply enough on pupil groups and their outcomes. This mirrors the poorly focused work of other leaders in the school.

In relation to safeguarding, governors take effective action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Your work with staff ensures that pupils feel safe and it reflects a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Parents are also mostly supportive of the school.

During the inspection, we looked closely at the teaching of mathematics, including how well pupils are being stretched and challenged to reach the highest standards. The quality of teaching remains variable and is not good enough. In particular, teachers do not make the best use of assessment information to adjust or adapt next steps to build quickly on what pupils already know, understand and can do. As a result, therefore, pupils do not make consistently strong progress, particularly in relation to shape, space and measures. Outcomes for pupils in mathematics remain too variable. Teachers do not routinely intervene quickly enough to correct misconceptions or pupils' weaknesses. As a result, gaps persist in pupils' knowledge. This particularly affects the achievement of vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN. However, during this academic year, and most notably since the spring term 2018, continuing professional development focused on securing pupils' fluency and reasoning of number and calculation and is leading to improving standards. Teachers' improving subject knowledge, including supporting pupils to use concrete models and mathematical resources, is helping pupils to deepen their understanding of key concepts, such as place value. Furthermore, in lessons, pupils are now being challenged to justify or explain their mathematical thinking and reasoning. They like working together and find this approach helpful in solving a range of mathematical problems.

External support

You have ensured that the school has complied with the request for an external review of governance. These reviews have taken place in October 2016 and March 2018. The latter of these has been most helpful in providing next steps and recommendations, which governors are implementing. In addition, you voluntarily commissioned a pupil premium review in November 2017. This made particular recommendations which you are following. These include appointing a pupil premium link governor and staff champion. Again, leaders have acted on these suggestions. However, there are continuing weaknesses in the school's pupil premium strategy, which lead to some persistent underachievement by pupils. In particular, the newly appointed pupil premium leader has limited time to undertake the work required and has limited experience in this area. Furthermore, key recommendations, such as ensuring that disadvantaged pupils have clear learning plans, are not yet in place. Although the recently appointed link governor is keen and has met with the leader, there is not yet a fully functioning strategy in place to improve pupils' outcomes well enough. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils at your school are not progressing as well as non-disadvantaged pupils nationally. Leaders do not have a strong enough or detailed understanding of how well different groups or pupils who are disadvantaged are doing.

The local authority has provided additional support and challenge, through visits and training, on a regular basis. These have been focused on areas for development arising from the previous inspection, particularly mathematics. A recent visit in June 2018 from the school's new school improvement partner has provided a range of

appropriate recommendations for leaders and governors. The improvement partner is also accurate in his appraisal of the school's current position. However, leaders have not been able to use the full range of support consistently to move the school to a position of strength. You and other leaders know that there is much more to do to ensure that the school will be judged good at the next full inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Stewart Gale HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector