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4 November 2015

Mrs Helen Hedar
Headteacher
Longford Primary School
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Dear Mrs Hedar

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 October 2015, 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure senior leaders respond more quickly once weaknesses in teaching and learning are identified
- make sure that pupils have frequent opportunities to extend and develop their writing skills
- ensure all teachers plan activities that consistently challenge the most-able pupils in order to help them reach higher standards.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and teachers with responsibility for the early years, English and mathematics to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. I had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative. The school improvement plan was

evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the written feedback to teachers following checks on pupils' work and the latest information about pupils' achievement. During this inspection visit you joined me on visits to all classes. We talked to pupils about their learning and we looked at examples of pupils' writing and mathematics work.

Context

Since the previous inspection the governing body has appointed one new teacher. She joined the school in September 2015. The teacher with responsibility for leading developments in the early years was given this responsibility from September 2015.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders are, with success, encouraging staff to work together and share ideas so that pupils in all year groups make better progress than in the past. The actions within the school improvement plan are appropriate and suitably focused on strengthening all aspects of the school's work. You have identified correctly the need to ensure that the gap between the standards attained by boys and disadvantaged pupils in the school, and pupils nationally, continues to close.

The roles of teachers with responsibility for subjects or year groups are developing effectively. Together with you and the deputy headteacher they check the work of teachers and regularly discuss how well pupils are learning. As a result, you and other senior leaders have an accurate understanding of where further improvements are required. However, once weaknesses are identified, they are not always followed up quickly enough. This is leading to some inconsistencies in teaching and in pupils' learning across different subjects.

Training and support for all teachers has focused on teaching reading, writing and mathematics, and setting more interesting work for pupils. This is having a beneficial impact on pupils currently in the early years as well as in Years 1 to 6. During our visits to lessons, pupils were behaving well and enjoying completing their activities. Pupils in Year 4, for instance, spoke enthusiastically about using all their senses to write about the rainforest. Work in pupils' books shows strong improvements in basic mathematical skills and also in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Staff are providing pupils increasingly with the opportunity to deepen their mathematical understanding by solving more complex problems. In contrast, pupils are not yet given enough opportunities to extend and develop their writing skills.

Teachers, including those in the early years, are getting better at planning activities that match the learning needs of pupils with different abilities. Nevertheless, you recognise that the activities for the most-able pupils across the school are not always challenging enough. Work in pupils' books shows that when they finish their work they are often asked to do more of the same and are not given the chance to build on what they already know and can do.

The presentation of pupils' work is steadily improving. Teachers expect pupils to write neatly. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 have additional time during the week to practise their handwriting because you recognise rightly that they struggle to present their work to a high standard. Teachers are aware of what pupils need to do to improve their work and are getting better at communicating this to pupils.

Governors have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities as a result of recent training, combined with the external review of governance. The Chair of the Governing Body has high aspirations for the pupils and together with other governors is keeping a closer check on the performance of different groups of pupils. The information they receive from senior leaders is helpful and is enabling them to ask pertinent questions about pupils' achievement and teaching. They are aware, for instance, that in the last academic year pupils in Year 6 did not make enough progress in writing and mathematics from their starting points in Year 2 because of previous weaknesses in teaching. Similarly they know that although a higher proportion of children overall reached a good level of development at the end of Reception in 2015, further work is required to ensure that more boys and disadvantaged children are ready for Year 1. Governors are determined that these weaknesses in pupils' achievement do not recur.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

Prior to the inspection in March 2015 the local authority arranged for school leaders and staff to receive intensive support from the Britannia Teaching School Alliance. You and other senior leaders have continued to benefit from this support. Additionally, the local authority adviser and local authority partners have provided helpful training for senior leaders, staff and governors. This combined support has contributed to improvements in pupils' achievement, teaching, leadership and governance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Staffordshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector