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21 January 2015

Ms Claire Willows
Sutton St James Community Primary School
Bells Drove
Sutton St James
Spalding
PE12 0JG

Dear Ms Willows

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutton St James Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 January 2014, 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 September 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection 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. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that the school's improvement plan:
 - fully identifies who is responsible for leading actions and when; the specific training and resources required and how governors will check actions are accomplished and evaluate the impact.
 - reflects the school's focus on improving progress in mathematics by teaching pupils to recall basic number facts easily and includes how the school will support pupils to improve their spoken grammar

You have agreed to forward the amended school improvement plan to me by 13 February 2015.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and head of school, other staff members, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. I visited all classrooms, held discussions with pupils and looked at examples of their books and other work. I evaluated the school improvement plan I scrutinized the most recent nationally produced data on the pupils' achievement, a self-evaluation report prepared by the school and the outcomes of monitoring activities carried out by senior leaders, including governors.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in September 2014 the school has continued to be jointly led by an executive headteacher, who is also the head of Monkshouse Primary School, Spalding, and a head of school. The two schools work together in federation and this arrangement for leadership is due to continue until September 2015. Governors are currently seeking to recruit a permanent headteacher. The school has been unable to appoint permanent staff to two teaching vacancies, which represents half of the total teaching staff. This means that middle leaders' posts remain vacant. The teaching posts are covered by temporary staff.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and head of school share a clear view about the challenges the school faces and the urgency with which they need to be addressed. An external review of governance was carried out swiftly following the last inspection and an appropriate action plan developed. There are clear signs that this is now having a positive impact on school improvement.

Leaders, including governors, have identified strategies quickly to improve the quality of teaching. They are taking full advantage of professional development opportunities for teachers provided by the federated school. The high expectations of leaders are now being reflected in the performance management of staff. The school's own evaluation recognises that not all teaching is of a high enough standard to ensure that all pupils are making good progress but that it is improving.

Senior leaders have rightly focussed on the comments made by teachers on pupils' work and supports learning well. Their expectations for teachers' marking have been clarified and there is evidence that this is beginning to have an impact. Pupils can say how the new process is helping them to learn and are keen to talk through examples of this in their books. Regular work scrutiny led by the head of school and a named governor are ensuring that this is a high priority for improvement.

The school is working hard to improve progress in English. Changes to the school curriculum now provide greater opportunities for pupils to write at length and there are clear strategies in place to engage boys with writing. However the school does not monitor topics sufficiently carefully to ensure that pupils do not cover the same

learning in consecutive years. There are planned changes to enhance the school's library and to increase the range and scope of reading books. The school has raised expectations for handwriting although it is too early to see if this is making a difference. School support for pupils to improve their spoken grammar in order to further improve spelling and written grammar skills is not yet in place.

School leaders have carefully scrutinised the teaching and learning in mathematics and this has enabled them to identify the need to make sure that pupils learn basic number facts and calculation strategies in order to be able to complete mathematical problems more easily. The school improvement plan should reflect this new approach together with the actions planned to monitor and evaluate the impact.

The curriculum has been developed to provide a range of opportunities for pupils to meet and learn with others from a range of backgrounds different to their own. Pupils are very enthusiastic about these additional opportunities, particularly the new pen friends to whom they will soon be writing. An increased use of communication technology would also enable pupils to learn and engage with others who live too far away to visit.

School leaders have identified that assessment and moderation processes have not been good enough in the recent past and that this has resulted in inaccurate assessments levels being given in some year groups. They have taken urgent action to address this but believe that progress data will not be fully reliable for this academic year.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I have recommended that a further visit take place to monitor the progress of the school once the new headteacher is in post, with particular reference to improvements in teaching and the progress of learners.

External support

The local authority continues to support the school and, although there had been a slight pause due to change in personnel, this is now firmly in place. There is a clear plan for practical advice and support for school leaders to further develop the robust monitoring of teaching and pupils' progress. Officers from the local authority support are also helping to co-ordinate professional development opportunities for leaders, teachers and support staff.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire.

Yours sincerely

Karen Gannon
Her Majesty's Inspector

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority