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Andrew Ward
Byfield School
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Dear Mr Ward

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Byfield School

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 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 month and year. 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 that all sections of the school development plan are regularly and frequently monitored, relating to measurable targets whenever possible
- Enable further delegation of subject coordination through prompt and effective leadership development
- Accelerate the impact of initiatives to improve spelling to match the improvements seen in the quality of handwriting.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, the class teacher for Year 2, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor who is chair of the resources committee, and had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority, to discuss

the action taken since the last inspection. I looked at a range of documents including the school development plan and the post-Ofsted action plan, minutes of the meetings of the governing body and their committees, records of visits made by the local authority and recent newsletters. I also looked at a sample of exercise books. I toured the school with you, visiting all classes to see the learning that was taking place. I held informal conversations with members of staff and pupils during the tour.

Context

There have not been any significant changes since the last inspection. One class continues to be taught by a regular supply teacher to cover long-term staff absence. You are working with the governing body to investigate the opportunity to join a local multi-academy trust.

Main findings

You have written a school development plan that includes the post-Ofsted action plan. This document is divided into sections that correspond directly with the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. You have described clearly the actions to be taken and when.

The school development plan is supplemented by a 'log of action, monitoring, evaluation and next steps'. This is helpful. Alongside your rating of progress against each objective every half-term, the log provides a regular recording of monitoring of each action, on a regular – and in places daily basis. However, there are sections where dates of when monitoring will take place are not precise or frequent enough. You have identified who is responsible for monitoring different aspects of the plan, but it is not always clear how monitoring is to be carried out. In places, success criteria do not include measurable, quantifiable targets, for example, with reference to pupil progress and the quality of teaching and learning. Evaluation and next steps sections lack measurable criteria, such as assessment data, which would tighten evidence of progress being made, or of necessary refinement to actions currently in place when a target has not been met.

You have used the log of action to record clearly the planning and consequent improvement to the early years outdoor area. The early years teachers have responded promptly and effectively to improve this area, making it more tidy and increasing the range of equipment and learning opportunities for the pupils. You recognise the physical limitations of the site and this remains a priority for improvement within your planning for the development of the school premises.

It is necessary to accelerate the progress made in addressing some areas for improvement. You are aware of this. You and your staff have spent significant time on choosing a whole school approach to spelling and a new scheme has now been agreed. Interim, immediate measures are less clear. There are raised expectations

for corrections and improvements to spelling as part of marking and written feedback from teachers. However there is inconsistency across different classes in how well this is applied. In the best examples, marking and feedback is regular and targeted, with corrections made to spellings. The extent to which pupils respond to this and correct their work varies across the school and in different subjects. For example, in one class, spelling is routinely corrected in literacy books but incorrect spelling goes unchecked in mathematics.

You have raised expectations for the standard of presentation of pupil's work. Every class now spends 15 minutes every day after lunch developing their handwriting. This is successful and there are clear improvements in the quality of handwriting and presentation, for example by using squared paper in mathematics. You encourage pupils to take more pride in their work and this is reflected in more displays of pupils' work in classrooms. This would have greater impact if the work on display included teachers' comments and assessment.

Your communications with parents have improved since the last inspection. You write regular newsletters and a meeting is due to take place soon to keep parents informed on progress in addressing the areas for improvement. Parents have responded well to new initiatives, giving positive feedback to the new online resource for use at home to boost numeracy and spelling, and to the endeavours to clean and tidy the outdoor area.

You have made decisions regarding staffing in the best interests of the pupils and to cope with long-term staff absence. This has had implications for the leadership of some key curriculum areas which you have taken on yourself. You recognise the need to secure sustainability of leadership of these areas. You are correct in acknowledging that delegation is essential to ensure you can focus on your priorities for strategic planning. You are taking appropriate action to address this. You have organised opportunities for leadership development amongst your staff and have arranged appropriate training and coaching for those with the potential to take on more responsibilities.

You rightly acknowledge that the progress towards addressing the areas for improvement needs to gather momentum and is sustained without reliance on external support at its current level.

Governance

Governors have responded promptly and effectively to the previous inspection report. They now meet fortnightly to monitor the progress of the action plan. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the priorities for the school. They have identified key areas for development in their own expertise and attend training accordingly. This means that they are able to provide an appropriate level of challenge and support to you from an increasingly informed background. They demonstrate a high level of commitment to fulfil their responsibilities.

The governors value their role in monitoring. They have found recent learning walks to be highly informative, for example, with you to look at the quality of the school's environment, and with a member of the local authority to see the learning taking place.

The governors recognise the benefits of becoming more familiar with the work of governing bodies in other schools. They welcome the opportunities presented by the possibility of joining a local multi-academy trust and are pursuing this further.

External support

You receive extensive support from the local authority. This has become more concentrated since the last inspection. The local authority has brokered links with several primary schools, to support the leadership of teaching and learning and the introduction of the new scheme to improve spelling. You have received leadership development support. This has been highly valuable in helping you to address the areas for improvement, for example, in regular review and revision of the school development plan, in procedures for performance management and self-evaluation. All teachers have benefited from visits to an outstanding primary school to share good practice.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Carter-Fraser
Her Majesty's Inspector