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Iain Davidson
Headteacher
Grange School
Halsey Road
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Bedford
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Dear Mr Davidson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grange School

Following my visit to your school on 22 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- improve communication with staff at all levels in order to maintain their enthusiasm and ensure that all contribute to improving the school
- analyse accurately the progress pupils make across all subjects and set meaningful targets matched to pupils' abilities and skills
- evaluate the quality of teaching and learning more rigorously, taking into account how well pupils progress from their individual starting point.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and the subject leader for mathematics. I met 10 governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the actions taken since the first monitoring visit that took place in March

2015. I met a representative of the local authority and I also met two parents. I reviewed a range of school documentation, in particular, the data on pupils' achievement and evidence of your monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. I also read minutes of the Progress Evaluation Group (PEG). You joined me for some visits to classrooms.

Context

Soon after my first monitoring visit a new teacher took responsibility for the leadership of mathematics. In September 2015 a deputy headteacher will join the school to strengthen the senior leadership team, a new head of the primary school will replace the current post holder who is retiring and new subject leaders will take on responsibility for art and humanities.

Main findings

Insufficient progress has been made since the previous inspection and my first monitoring visit. The two parents I met praise teachers for the care and academic support they provide to their children, particularly in developing their reading and writing skills. Staff want the very best for pupils but, in practice, not all are successful in achieving this. This is because teachers' expectations are still too low. The targets set for pupils are not sufficiently precise or used to help them improve their work and raise standards in all year groups and across all subjects.

Communication between staff and senior leaders is deteriorating and morale is low. Some teachers feel that new ideas to improve teaching are not being implemented quickly enough and this affects their enthusiasm. Some meetings, such as the frequent meetings within the secondary school, are not focussed on the right things and lack debate about the quality of teaching and learning and how to improve it. This is disheartening for staff because time is wasted on minor issues instead of debating effective practice in order to drive improvement.

The leadership of English continues to develop effectively and for mathematics it is much improved. The new subject leader for mathematics is very proactive, well organised and knowledgeable. She is supporting staff well and sharing effective practice across the school. Exciting resources, such as the new 'Enrichment' boxes, are developing pupils' numeracy skills in a fun way, raising the profile of mathematics across subjects and enabling pupils to see how mathematics is applied in real life.

For a variety of reasons, the development of a reliable system for assessing pupils' progress has taken too long. The lack of accurate assessment is making the evaluation of teaching and learning unreliable. This is often too generous because it does not take full account of the progress pupils make from their starting points. The criteria used to evaluate teaching and learning places too much emphasis on what teachers do at the expense of what pupils actually learn and understand.

An external review of governance took place shortly after my first monitoring visit. Governors know what they have to do and the weekly Progress Evaluation Group meetings have become highly challenging. Governors are frustrated by the lack of accurate analysis of pupils' progress. In addition, they are aware of senior leaders' over-optimistic self-evaluation of the school's progress towards becoming a good school.

HMI will return to the school as soon as possible to carry out a further monitoring inspection.

External support

The local authority has challenged the school on several occasions and raised concerns. These have included parental complaints and the school's inappropriate decision to set an early study leave date for Year 11 students. The school is responding positively to these issues and reviewing its policies and practices accordingly. The local authority is funding the Achievement for All project but it is too early to see the full impact of this initiative. The school improvement adviser attends the Progress Evaluation Group meetings and is readily available for advice although this is rarely requested by the school. Some teachers visit effective schools and bring back new ideas to improve their practice. Some say they are 'buzzing' with excitement but soon lose their enthusiasm as they do not feel innovation is fully supported by senior leaders. Overall, the full impact of all external support on improving teaching, learning and assessment is still not effective enough.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, to the Department for Education - Academies Advisers Unit and to the Director of Children's Services for Bedford Borough.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector