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Mrs Zoe Hussain
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hussain

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Watton-at-Stone Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 February 2016, 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 June 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, several subject leaders, the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also undertook a tour of the school with you to talk to pupils about their work and review the quality of writing in their books. The latest monitoring reports by you and local authority improvement officers were reviewed.

Context

Two teachers have left since the last inspection. Three newly qualified teachers were appointed at the start of the academic year.

Main findings

You have tackled rapidly the key areas of weakness identified at the last inspection. An effective plan of action with clear priorities and tight timescales has galvanised both staff and governors in your drive to improve the school. These actions are set alongside specific targets linked to pupils' achievement to facilitate the effective monitoring of progress.

The proportion of good teaching is now much higher throughout the school. This is because of the actions taken resulting from your accurate monitoring of teaching and learning in lessons, and higher expectations. Effective support plans exist for any teacher whose teaching is still less than consistently good. Subject leaders are clear about their role in school improvement. For instance, your leader for English has worked closely with you to increase the level of challenge for pupils in the development of reading skills; as a result, most-able pupils in Year 4 can talk confidently to the rest of their class about what they have read in a newspaper during their reading session. Vibrant displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors reflect the good work achieved in many subjects, and support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

A review of pupils' books confirms that the vast majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are making good or better progress in their writing. Pupils are writing at length about a range of topics in several subjects other than English. Pupils, including some older boys who spoke to the inspector, say that they enjoy writing and feel challenged by the work. Pupils value the quality of marking and feedback that teachers provide for them because these help them to improve rapidly. As a result, spelling, punctuation and grammar in Year 6 are accurate. Handwriting and presentation are neat.

The detailed action plan and monitoring schedule provide a clear focus for governors, following a detailed review of the governing body procedures. As a result, governors play a greater role in school monitoring and evaluation. Their meetings with subject leaders add to their insights into the rate of school improvement, while giving them an opportunity to ask challenging questions of school leadership at all levels. This has strengthened lines of accountability and accelerated school improvement.

External support

You have made effective use of teaching and learning advisers from the local authority to support further staff training and the development of individual teachers. Detailed reviews by local authority improvement officers are rigorous in the analysis of assessment information. They clearly identify what has been achieved to date and highlight what the school needs to do to become good.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector