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Mr Joe McCrossan
Acting Headteacher
Thongsley Fields Primary and Nursery School
Buttsgrove Way
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Dear Mr McCrossan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thongsley Fields Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 6 November 2017, 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 May 2017. 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- build leadership capacity by effectively supporting middle leaders to develop their roles so that they have an impact on raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics
- develop rigorous systems to identify pupils who are not on track to make good and better progress from their individual starting points
- make sure that leaders and teachers use pupils' progress information more precisely to identify and support pupils who need to make more rapid progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your assistant headteacher, leaders responsible for English and mathematics, leaders of the early years and leaders of key stages 1 and 2. I also spoke with two members of the interim executive board and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. In addition, I visited a number of classes with your assistant headteacher, held meetings with other staff, spoke with parents and pupils, scrutinised pupils' work and evaluated school action plans.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in the leadership of the school. You have very recently taken on the role of acting headteacher, supported by your assistant headteacher. Additionally, a number of staff left the school at the end of the last academic year.

The assistant headteacher, who is also the leader for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, will be leaving the school at the end of this term. Since the previous inspection, an interim executive board has replaced the school governing body and 10 new members of staff have been employed, four of whom are newly qualified teachers.

Main findings

There have been significant changes in leadership and staffing, which have hindered progress in the areas identified for improvement outlined during the previous inspection. Despite the upheaval, senior leaders have started to implement appropriate improvements. However, instability within the leadership team has meant that leaders' actions have not been well enough developed or embedded to bring about sustained and significant improvement towards ensuring that the school becomes securely good.

Leaders' plans for school improvement detail specific actions to address the school priorities. You, the local authority and the interim executive board have rightly identified that, to secure and sustain leadership capacity, developing leadership at all levels is an urgent priority for the school. Consequently, the local authority is providing support to develop the role of middle leaders. Leaders I spoke with are enthusiastic and fully committed to meeting the school's priorities.

Pupils' achievement in reading was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection report. Leaders assess children's needs early in their school life. Developing speaking, listening, communication and language skills is a priority for the school. In the early years, leaders ensure that children are supported effectively to extend their vocabulary within phonics sessions. Early identification ensures that children have access to speech and language support early on in their learning.

Middle leaders have accurately identified gaps in pupils' understanding of reading comprehension in key stages 1 and 2. Evidence shows that teaching and learning strategies have been adapted to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of phonics and guided reading.

Leaders have effectively carried out monitoring of teaching and learning and have an accurate view of the quality across all year groups. Leaders have ensured that a considerable amount of training and support for staff is in place to meet the school's priorities, one of which is to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The local authority's primary adviser has provided teachers with clear direction in the teaching of English and mathematics. Evidence shows that teachers' confidence is improving and they are applying a more consistent approach within lessons. There are early signs of the impact of greater consistency of teaching. However, due to staffing changes, improvements have been too slow to ensure that pupils are making the progress they should.

The 2017 end-of-key-stage results have not indicated that there are signs of improvement. The majority of pupils are not making the progress they should from their starting points and, therefore, too few pupils are reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Current systems for the tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress are not yet fully developed. Consequently, teachers are not using assessment information precisely enough to challenge pupils or to intervene quickly to support pupils who are not on track or who need to catch up. As a result, pupils are not getting the support they need to make sufficient progress.

Leaders are working well to engage parents in their children's learning. This has been identified by the school as a priority. Parents speak highly of the school and recognise the importance of its place in the community. Parents of children in the early years contribute positively to their children's 'learning journeys' by sharing what they see their children doing away from school. Parents also attend workshops and sessions at the school to find out how their children are taught and what they are learning. For example, the launch of an online reading programme was extremely well attended and has had a positive impact on parents' involvement in reading with their children. Additionally, on the day of the inspection, parents attended a Roman assembly where pupils shared what they had been learning in history.

Leaders have ensured that records relating to safeguarding and provision for the most vulnerable pupils have been maintained since the previous inspection. The school business manager meticulously keeps the single central record up to date, ensuring that all checks for the many new staff members are carried out appropriately. The designated senior leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the best support available.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to the school. Senior leaders, the local authority and the interim executive board have made great strides towards improving leadership stability. They identified this as a matter of urgency and are doing all that they can to secure a strong and effective leadership team. Staff told me that they see your appointment as providing the school with much-needed leadership stability and direction. Furthermore, parents commented positively on your recent appointment and said that they were pleased you had made yourself known to them at the most recent parent and teacher consultation meeting.

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

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector