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Mark McCadden
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McCadden

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birdham CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 October 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 that 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 November 2016. 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that staff, leaders and governors use the detailed information that they already have about pupils' attainment to identify accurately where progress is too slow and take effective action to accelerate it
- refine and develop new approaches to how staff plan learning in mathematics, so that pupils move rapidly towards deeper learning.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Together, we visited all classrooms to observe learning, speak to pupils and look at their work. We also reviewed a sample of writing and mathematics work from pupils in Years 1, 3 and 5. I met with groups of pupils, staff and governors, and spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I reviewed a range of relevant information on the school website and documents provided by school leaders. These included the school's improvement plans, a selection of governors' meeting minutes, and reports from the local authority and other external support provided to the school. I also considered leaders' current information about how well pupils are learning.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been a number of staff changes. One teacher went on maternity leave and has now left the school. Her role has been covered for three terms by a temporary appointment. Another teacher joined the school in September 2017. Two teaching assistants have left, one who was temporary now has a permanent position and a new teaching assistant has joined the school. There have been changes to the administrative team, including two changes of bursar. There is a new chair of governors, and the governing body has also had two changes of clerk. Leadership roles have been restructured to focus on the development of English and mathematics across the school. Teachers leading these areas of the school are supported and overseen by the headteacher and the deputy headteacher.

Main findings

Leaders know their school well. They understand that improving pupils' progress remains an urgent priority, despite the evident improvements to pupils' outcomes over the last academic year. Along with their staff, they are committed to raising standards further, so that pupils are prepared well for life beyond Birdham Primary.

Leaders carefully monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school, using a wide range of evidence. They use expertise from beyond the school to check their judgements, and identify next steps for development, either for individuals or for groups of teachers. They provide staff with relevant training and support which develops their understanding, for example on ways to teach mathematics effectively. This, along with relevant celebrations and displays, has raised the profile of mathematics across the school, which is leading to improved outcomes over time.

In lessons, pupils now have opportunities to access learning at different levels, although this is not always targeted closely enough. Pupils report feeling challenged by learning activities in mathematics, and well-supported by resources available in

the classroom. During this visit, there was evidence, in lessons and pupils' books, of some opportunities for pupils to use what they have learned to solve problems and to reason. However, in some instances, opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding are missed, which limits rates of progress in mathematics, particularly for the most able.

By the end of the last academic year, outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics across almost all year groups showed an encouraging improvement from the previous year. In particular, the increase in the proportion of pupils achieving at least age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 is notable. However, leaders recognise that progress measures by the end of key stage 2 in 2017 were well below the national average, particularly in reading and mathematics. Leaders can show that pupils' progress in reading, writing and especially mathematics is now more rapid than in the past. However, they know that there is further work to do to accelerate rates of progress more, especially for the most able. They also identify that pupils currently in Year 6 will need effective support to make very rapid progress over the rest of the year, so that they achieve the strong outcomes of which they are capable.

The assessment and tracking system adopted by the school shows all staff what pupils can and cannot do compared with age-related expectations. This helps teachers to plan carefully for pupils' next steps in learning. Information on the school website is useful in mapping the key topics and concepts being covered each term as part of the wider curriculum. This helps parents to know what their children are learning across the range of subjects.

Leaders and governors have reviewed and adapted how staff's work is reviewed, to focus it sharply on pupils' outcomes. Regular meetings to review pupils' progress hold staff to account for the difference that their work makes to individual pupils. This supports teachers in planning future work and extra help carefully.

The headteacher gives governors a wealth of information about pupils' outcomes. This helps governors to gain an increasing understanding of what proportion of pupils are on track to achieve age-related expectations and/or a greater depth or higher standard of learning. Governors recognise the need to look increasingly carefully at the progress that pupils make across key stages, such as from their early years outcomes to the end of key stage 1. Leaders have systems in place that will, when fully in place, support them and governors to identify progress from starting points more readily in the future. At the time of this visit, use of these systems to pinpoint rates of progress for individual and groups of pupils is in the early stages of development.

Governors have a range of expertise and experience to support them in their role. As for other areas of the school, recent changes in personnel have been a challenge, which has slowed the pace of improvement. Governors are committed to the school and to their responsibilities as part of the wider leadership team. They

welcome the support from the local authority that is helping to develop their strategic role. This includes suggestions for questions governors can ask to hold school leaders to account for pupils' outcomes more effectively. Governors involve themselves actively in the life of the school, but recognise they need to focus more closely on the impact of their work. In particular, they identify that further improving their understanding of the wealth of information shared with them by the headteacher about pupils' achievements will help them to ask more perceptive questions about the progress that pupils are making.

External support

The local authority provides ongoing support to the school which is complemented by external consultant work commissioned by the school. Collectively, this provides a useful combination of validation, challenge and support to school leaders. The local authority's work to support governors in strengthening their practice has been particularly valued and effective. School leaders have also arranged further subject-specific support, which has helped to improve the quality of teaching of mathematics across the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chichester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for West Sussex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Moles

Her Majesty's Inspector