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Mrs Catriona Mugglestone
Merrydale Junior School
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Dear Mrs Mugglestone

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Merrydale Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 25 January 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in April 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 all teaching is consistently good by continuing the professional development for teaching staff
- speed up the progress and attainment of pupils in receipt of the pupil premium for mathematics in Year 4 and Year 6.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and the headteacher of a partner school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and the school's own tracking information of pupils' progress. I visited every classroom, looked at pupils' work and spoke to a group of pupils about their learning.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection, one teacher has resigned her position.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors have taken swift and effective action following the previous monitoring visit. The quality of teaching, particularly in Years 3 and 5, has improved. Senior leaders have implemented a good programme of training and development for teachers and, as a result, pupils are making better progress. However, not all teaching is consistently good and leaders need to continue to provide good-quality professional development to ensure that all pupils make good progress.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a comprehensive view of the performance of all groups of pupils in every year. As a consequence, pupils are being targeted for extra support to help ensure that they do not underachieve. Senior leaders' monitoring of these intervention groups show that most pupils make accelerated progress. Most-able pupils are also being tracked and intervention groups are provided to ensure that these pupils reach their full potential. Girls are making the same or better progress as boys in all subjects. The school's pupil tracking information shows the majority of pupils are making good progress. However, standards of attainment are still too low, particularly in Years 5 and 6, due to the legacy of underachievement. In Years 3 and 4, the majority of pupils are making good progress and the standard of attainment in relation to their ages is higher.

Governors have increased their monitoring role of the school's performance and consequently have a much more informed view of how well the school is doing. Following the review of how pupil premium funding is allocated, actions to improve the performance of disadvantaged pupils were listed in the school improvement plan. Governors hold regular meetings with the school's senior leaders to monitor these actions and to discuss the progress of this group of pupils. As a result of the targeted interventions for disadvantaged pupils and the close scrutiny by leaders, this group made better progress than other pupils last term in most year groups.

Disadvantaged pupils are also attaining higher than non-disadvantaged pupils in most year groups, except for mathematics in Years 4 and 6.

The school has promoted the love of reading to pupils and this has had a positive effect on their attitudes to reading. Pupils are allowed and encouraged to come into school from 8.15am onwards to read. Pupils told me that this time helps them to read because the adults explain words they do not know and it also allows them to do at least 15 minutes of independent reading. There is a whole set of rewards for individuals and classes for the amount of times pupils read by themselves for 15 minutes, which has really motivated pupils to read. The school's reading books are of good quality. During the morning guided reading session I observed that not one pupil was disengaged from their book.

In English lessons, pupils' vocabulary is being increased. This is due to the standard of texts being studied and pupils being taught strategies of how they may derive the meaning of an unknown word to support their understanding of the text. Pupils show great perseverance with their reading, even when the text is challenging.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher work well together and have led improvements in the quality of teaching. The special educational needs coordinator has tracked the progress of groups to ensure that the correct pupils are getting the right support. The assistant headteachers are leading their year groups well and overseeing the work of other year groups. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for the school. The mathematics leader is aware of the need to promote more mathematical reasoning across the curriculum. Pupils are given good opportunities to reason mathematically in Year 4. In English, the school is taking part in a local authority English project to raise standards. Pupils are being challenged with good-quality texts as part of this project.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are strong. They are well aware of the school's aims of how to be a good learner. Pupils say it is important they work in teams and never speak when someone else is speaking. Pupils added that the behaviour in classrooms is good. They appreciate the support teachers and teaching assistants give them, particularly for their reading, to help them understand how characters are feeling in the stories. They enjoy school and understand why it is important to learn. Pupils are motivated to work hard.

External support

The local authority has continued to support the school well. The adviser regularly monitors the school's performance and a consultant has worked with middle leaders to strengthen their leadership skills. Training has been provided for governors to develop further their understanding of information about pupils' progress. As a result of this work, leadership has been strengthened.

The support from a local outstanding school has been very effective to improve the quality of teaching. The headteacher of Parks Primary School has monitored the quality of teaching at Merrydale and given good feedback to teachers which they have taken on board. The support and challenge that she has provided to the senior leaders at Merrydale have also been appreciated and helped drive the school forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch
Her Majesty's Inspector