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Mr N Heath
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Heath

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ilchester Community School

Following my visit to your school on 13 January 2014, 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 September 2014. 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. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that a summary school improvement plan is created so that the governing body can more readily hold the school leaders to account for the planned actions
- enable and ensure pupils consistently refer back to their last piece of best work their understanding about what they can do and should aim for
- carry out the planned visits to outstanding providers to increase expertise and extend teacher's training and development

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, the leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage, the leader for mathematics and the Chair of the Governing Body, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative from the local authority. Discussions were held with eight pupils, representing more able mathematicians from Years 3 to 6; two from each year group. The governing body minutes, headteacher's report to the governing body, the mental mathematics audit and the records of pupils' progress meetings were taken into account. All classes were visited during which time a selection of pupils' mathematics books were reviewed. The school's Strategic Development Plan was evaluated.

Context

A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage was internally appointed in January 2015. There are two shadow leaders for literacy and numeracy.

Main findings

With the return of key staff there has been greater capacity for driving school improvement through monitoring and evaluation. The leaders for English and mathematics have looked at teachers' planning, pupils' books and conducted lesson observations. This has raised teachers' expectations of what standards are required. As a result, teachers on both sites to keep more informed about the way they work and the progress that pupils should be making. In addition, the teachers shadowing these activities are building up their confidence and expertise with a view to taking over the responsibility for these areas. In due course this will enable the deputy headteachers to have an increased capacity to provide strategic leadership for each school site and the headteacher.

Monitoring of pupils' books by senior leaders and teachers' feedback to pupils is encouraging pupils to take greater care over the presentation of their work: improvements over the term were clearly evident in the books seen. An excellent example of modelling how to record numbers neatly was seen in one classroom where the teacher was using a flip chart with squared paper. From this, pupils could see the benefit of working tidily when using the column method in mathematics. Whilst the best examples of pupils are shared and displayed it would be helpful for the pupils to be able to easily refer back to their last piece of best work. This is so that they can understand what they are capable of doing and what it is they need to aim for.

Diagnostic testing of pupils' mental mathematics capabilities was conducted by the headteacher with each class teacher. These joint observations of pupils' reactions has enabled teachers and leaders more accurately spot gaps in pupils' understanding

or reliance on undeveloped mathematical methods. As a result, the school has introduced 'math magician' sessions to target and secure improvement in these specific areas. Pupils told the inspector how much they enjoyed these extra mathematical activities. They also said that they felt that since the inspection mathematics lesson provided them with more challenges. Although pupils really appreciated this change they wanted to be challenged further and have even more opportunities to do mathematics.

The allocation of different school leaders to either monitor or evaluate the main strands of the school's strategic development plan is ensuring greater accountability and shared responsibility when all come together to judge the impact of planned actions. This quality of monitoring and evaluation is not taking place at governing body level. At the moment the school improvement plan/strategic development plan is too cumbersome and unwieldy for the governing body to use easily in its meetings. Consequently, governors are having difficulty in checking the progress that the school is making in 'getting to good'. It would be helpful for them to have the success criteria for key issues clearly marked so that they, as well as leaders, can see at a glance whether the rate of progress is fast enough.

Governors have ensured that school policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. They have recently completed an audit of their skills and are looking to recruit new members to fill where they have identified gaps. Governors have had training in the past on understanding data and are in the process of looking at further training to understand the new Raiseonline format and changes to the assessment of pupils' work.

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

External support

Somerset Local Authority have commissioned the North Somerset Local Authority and a local leader of education to provide Early Years Foundation Stage support and training. They are currently helping the school to moderate the judgements made about the children's starting points and the progress they make. As a result, staff have changed the way that children are assessed, with new short and longer term tracking documentation. This has enabled the school to have robust information about children's starting points and the progress that should be expected of them over the year. Staff are working as a close team to use this information to resolve any gaps in the children's learning. It is also intended that further external moderation will be undertaken in March and the summer term.

The same local leader of education has also just started working with the school to help implement other area of the schools action plan. It is too early to judge the impact of this work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector