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Mr Jason Holland
The Headteacher
Montpelier Primary School
North Down Road
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Dear Mr Holland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Montpelier Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 February 2015, 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 July 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 all teachers check pupils' understanding and adjust their lessons to maintain the right level of challenge for individuals and groups
- improve pupils' progress and attainment in writing across the school, particularly in grammar, punctuation and spelling
- develop the skills of year leaders in monitoring and evaluating the progress of all pupils and in ensuring the pupils make consistently good progress in reading, writing and mathematics

- add measurable 'milestones' to the action plan to help governors to check that the school is making the required improvements within the given timescale.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and acting deputy head, the English and mathematics subject leaders, pupils, members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and other documents examined, such as information on pupils' progress and the performance management of staff. The inspector and headteacher jointly conducted a learning walk, visiting all classrooms, and looked at pupils' books at the same time.

Context

Since the inspection, there have been considerable staff changes and a new Chair of Governors. The school is in the process of appointing a new deputy headteacher to replace the previous deputy who has left the school.

Main findings

Given the recent instability in staffing, the headteacher and acting deputy are rightly putting in place clear systems and procedures for planning lessons and assessing pupils' progress, including the marking of pupils' work. Consequently, these aspects of teaching are becoming much more consistent across the school. The headteacher has introduced an effective system for managing teachers' performance, which is linked very clearly to pupils' progress. Rigorous checking and evaluation of the progress of individuals and groups of pupils are used to hold teachers and year group leaders to account and to identify appropriate intervention for the pupils. The experience of year group leaders is varied, and senior leaders have identified the need to develop their leadership skills.

The headteacher is developing well the skills of the new English and mathematics subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. These middle leaders have visited subject leaders in the National Support School. The mathematics leader is attending a well-regarded course on middle leadership. Both subject leaders appropriately analyse information on pupils' progress and check the progress in pupils' books. They have formed curriculum teams, with teachers from each year group, who support other teachers and share good practice. Curriculum teams are making sure that previous gaps in pupils' learning are now being covered. They also check that the learning objectives for each lesson are at the right level of challenge for the pupils. Relevant training for the whole staff has been provided in phonics and writing.

High quality displays of pupils' work show an improvement in the content and presentation of pupils' writing. Pupils are learning to join their handwriting from the Early Years Foundation Stage, although more attention to grammar and to developing strategies for spelling is needed throughout the school. Senior and middle leaders are rightly improving the accuracy of teachers' assessment of writing, and have identified this as a priority for further improvement.

The school's information indicates that pupils' progress across the year groups is good in reading, broadly as expected in mathematics, but below expectations in writing. Girls outperform boys in reading and writing. The gap between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others is closing in some year groups, but not consistently. This uneven progress across subjects and for groups of pupils is due to previous gaps in pupils' learning, especially in writing and mathematics, and to teachers' inconsistent use of assessment during lessons.

In the most effective lessons, teachers constantly check pupils' understanding and increase the challenge for those who learn quickly, or go over the learning for those who need more practice. For example, in a Year 4 class, more able pupils were challenged to use subordinate clauses in their sentences while others practised using different conjunctions. In marking pupils' books, the teacher wrote helpful next steps so that the pupils knew precisely what to do to improve their work. Their books showed good progress over time in writing. In another Year 4 class, the most able pupils were challenged to plot co-ordinates to make a star, while others appropriately practised reading co-ordinates. Not all teachers are skilled in assessing pupils' understanding during the lesson and adjusting the level of challenge for different pupils in this way.

Behaviour and attendance continue to be good. In almost all lessons, pupils displayed positive attitudes to learning and were engaged in their work. They worked well together. Pupils say they feel safe in school and are confident that teachers would tackle any concerns they may have. They learn about different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and how to keep themselves safe.

The Governing Body is well informed about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors hold senior leaders to account by questioning the school's evaluation of the progress on its action plan and on pupils' progress each half-term. The action plan, however, does not include measurable outcomes for each half-term to help the governors to know whether or not the improvements are on track. Governors visit the school regularly and receive reports from the National Leader of Education.

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

The local authority and teaching school have funded appropriate support for the school. This includes support from a National Leader of Education and his National Support School in Exeter, and support from an ex-headteacher. The impact of the support is monitored closely by the local authority and teaching school through termly meetings. The school is clearly using it to good effect in developing the skills of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning, and in developing the skills of governors in holding senior leaders to account.

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

Yours sincerely

Sue Frater

Her Majesty's Inspector