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Mr David Sansom
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sansom

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to River Bank Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 September 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in July 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders, governors and the academy trust are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to ensure that there is consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all year groups by ensuring that:

- teachers use pupils' progress information more precisely to enable all pupils, including the most able, to make good or better progress from their different starting points

- teachers have consistently high expectations for the presentation of pupils' work, particularly in handwriting
- pupils are provided with more opportunities to write at length across a range of different subjects and for different purposes.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher, the chair of the governing body and the chief executive of the academy trust, who is also the vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with middle leaders responsible for phonics, English and mathematics, your school improvement partner and a local headteacher with national leader of education status. We discussed the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school action plans were discussed and evaluated. Together, we observed teaching in all year groups. We discussed the monitoring of teaching and learning, pupils' progress and attainment information, your school self-evaluation, and the single central record of pre-employment checks.

Context

You took up the post of headteacher in October 2017. Prior to your appointment the deputy headteacher was the acting headteacher at the school. You are the fourth headteacher since the school opened in 2013. The school has experienced a high level of instability in staffing, including within the leadership team.

Main findings

Since taking up the role of headteacher you have worked determinedly and have only recently secured a stable staffing structure. You and the governors have been fully involved in recruitment and as a result you have now established a good balance of experience and knowledge. Staff morale is high. Teachers and parents are positive about the changes and structures that you and your leadership team have implemented so far.

Turbulence in the school's staffing, particularly since the previous inspection, has hindered you from securing improvements as quickly as you would have wanted over the last year. However, during that time you have ensured that plans to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been implemented to raise pupils' outcomes. School attainment information has been reviewed with the local authority and is already showing an improvement in reading, writing and mathematics across all years.

One significant focus for leaders was to positively engage with parents, to reassure them so that they could have confidence in the new leadership. You and your leaders' actions to involve parents in school activities and their children's learning has been a huge success for the school. You have embraced opportunities to work

with and gain the trust of parents. Parents willingly attend the many workshops you provide to help them gain a better understanding of how their children are taught and how they learn, make friends and gain a sense of belonging. Parents are extremely happy with the changes and improvements that have come about due to your leadership. They volunteer to help on trips and you actively encourage them to help at special events, such as the history day I observed during the inspection. This has helped improve attendance and persistent absence has reduced significantly. The school building, too, has become a valuable resource for the local people. As a result, you have successfully placed River Bank Primary School at the heart of the community.

The school's plan for improvement includes the areas for development highlighted at the previous inspection. You have invested considerable resource in ensuring that staff receive the professional development they need to secure strong subject knowledge. You have reviewed your marking and feedback policy and your experienced teachers are working with those who are less experienced or newly qualified. You have identified the barriers to learning that are making it harder for pupils to write well and reach the expected standard. However, you and your leaders' monitoring show that there are early signs of improvement in the quality of teaching and quality of pupils' writing. You are also beginning to see more consistency in teachers' approach to the teaching of writing across the school.

You have made promising progress in developing subject leadership. You have successfully empowered your subject leaders, who are enthusiastically embracing their new roles. Your new subject leader responsible for mathematics has worked particularly well at identifying barriers to pupils' learning as well as gaps in teachers' knowledge and understanding. She has already implemented changes that will continue to support teachers to develop their practice. Her plans for improvement are clear and processes for evaluating their impact on pupils' learning are effective.

Leaders for phonics and English have credible plans in place to raise standards. Your immediate priority was rightly ensuring that the current Year 5 pupils were supported to make as much progress as possible. These were the pupils identified as not making the progress they should at the time of the previous inspection. The teaching and learning over time was stronger in this year group and pupils' outcomes have much improved.

Year 5 pupils present their work well, although this is not the case across all year groups. It is evident that children in Reception and key stage 1 are taught to form letters correctly; however, they do not always transfer these skills into their writing. Leaders have revised the curriculum to provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing across a range of subjects.

Since the previous inspection you have reviewed your curriculum to ensure that reading and the love of reading is a strong focus. High-quality texts support topics and are used to consolidate spelling, grammar and punctuation. Outcomes have

improved in reading, writing and mathematics across year groups. This is particularly the case for the most able, where more pupils are attaining greater depth at the end of Year 2 in writing and mathematics. Leaders have revised systems for assessing pupils' learning. It remains a priority for leaders to ensure that more pupils reach the expected standards and for teachers to check closely the progress of all pupils.

Children in the early years have made a positive start to full-time education. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development has improved and is now in line with national averages. Your changes to the children's outdoor learning environment engage them well, particularly in supporting their physical development and personal, social and emotional areas of learning. Children are taught to care for each other. An example of this was seen during the inspection where a child helped a line of children across stepping stones, holding each child's hand to help them balance. You have successfully closed the attainment gap between the attainment of boys and girls, which was an area to improve at the previous inspection. It was evident that children are happy, settled and confident learners. This positive improvement in early years provides secure foundations for leaders to build upon to ensure that pupils' achievement is good in the coming years.

External support

School leaders and governors have worked effectively with the local authority to meet the school's priorities. Regular monitoring and evaluation of leaders' work, by your school improvement partner, has effectively supported school improvement. In addition, you are working closely with the local headteacher to support the development of subject leaders. She is also preparing teachers to work with your first Year 6 cohort. Teachers are extremely positive about the work leaders have completed so far, particularly in relation to securing strength in the senior leadership team and stability in the teaching staff.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Luton. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Cindy Impey
Her Majesty's Inspector