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30 January 2015

Miss H Williamson
The Headteacher
Billingshurst Primary School
Upper Station Road
Billingshurst
RH14 9RE

Dear Miss Williamson

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Billingshurst Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 and 29 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection that took place in March 2014. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for West Sussex.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Chadwick
Additional Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in March 2014

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school, so that pupils' progress is at least good by:
 - ensuring all teachers have high expectations of what all pupils, including the most able, can achieve
 - improving significantly the quality and presentation of pupils' written work in all subjects, especially in Years 1,2,3
 - developing the skills of teaching assistants and carefully monitoring the impact of their work
 - making sure that teachers assess pupils' knowledge and skills consistently and accurately.
- Raising standards so that all pupils, including those who are disabled or those who have special educational needs, achieve well by:
 - ensuring that teachers in Years 1 and provide high levels of challenge for children who leave Reception with above average attainment so that they typically reach Level 3 by the end of Year 2
 - ensuring the intensive support for mathematics currently provided is reflected in significantly better attainment by the end of Year 6.
- Implement more rigorous procedures for recording and analysing pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning, noting trends in the behaviour of individuals and groups and taking prompt action to tackle emerging issues.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all senior leaders fully support and implement effectively the headteacher's drive for improvement
 - ensuring new middle leaders have a thorough understanding of pupils' performance across the school
 - implementing rigorous monitoring of work in Years 1 and 2
 - ensuring that all external support provides a consistently high level of challenge so that current trends of improvement are sustained.

The school should undertake an external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium funding, in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 28 and 29 January 2015

Evidence

The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers, three middle leaders, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and two representatives of the local authority. She scrutinised a range of documentation, including minutes from the governors' meetings, evaluations carried out by the school, the school's monitoring information, reports completed by external advisers, information about staff training and school information on pupils' progress. Ten lessons were observed, as well as short visits to different year groups. All observations were jointly with senior leaders. The inspector looked at pupils' books and heard a sample of pupils reading in Years 2 and 3.

Context

There have been several staff changes since the previous monitoring inspection. Both the new assistant headteacher for Key Stage 2 and new subject leader for English joined the school in September 2014. Six new teachers have been appointed. This includes the three teachers who began in January, two of whom are newly qualified teachers.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher continues to provide a strong drive for improvement. She is well supported by the deputy headteacher. Leadership capacity has been strengthened by the appointments of the assistant headteacher for Key Stage 2 and the English subject leader. The leadership team now shares the same clarity of purpose and all are determined to raise standards across the school through improvements in the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. This evaluation has been achieved through robust checks on pupils' progress, through regular lesson observations, scrutiny of their work, and analysis of their assessments. Senior leaders are aware that more needs to be done to ensure all pupils do as well as they should.

Middle leaders are developing their roles to support senior leaders, especially in helping colleagues to implement the school's new curriculum. Curriculum teams from year groups across the school support the English and mathematics leaders. Subject leaders check pupils' assessments and examine pupils' work across year groups, but they have not yet observed lessons across different parts of the school. This restricts any subject issues in particular classes from being quickly identified and remedied.

Attainment is starting to improve. In the 2014 national tests and assessments, Year 6 pupils' overall attainment was average compared with their low attainment in the

last three years. However, pupils still did not make enough progress compared with their above average starting points when beginning Key Stage 2. Pupils' improved progress in mathematics in 2014 stemmed from school leaders' good management of the help provided by mathematics specialists commissioned by the school. This work included subject training for teachers and management training for the mathematics subject leader.

Senior leaders have rightly focused on improving the teaching of writing during this academic year while maintaining the momentum in mathematics. The current Year 6 pupils are on track to show an improvement in their results, including in writing. However, spelling and punctuation remain a weakness for low-attaining and some middle-attaining pupils. School leaders have strengthened teachers' subject knowledge and ensured that pupils in different classes in the same year group are taught similar themes and skills. For example, pupils in all classes in Year 3, when studying the Ancient Greeks for history, wrote poetry using high quality, vivid imagery. This included figures of speech, such as 'spears shouting', after pupils learned how personification can bring writing alive.

The proportions of pupils reaching higher levels are improving, but not quickly enough, especially in Key Stage 1. While progress in Year 1 is more consistent than previously for able pupils, their work is still too easy in some classes in Year 2. The proportions of the pupils achieving Levels 5 and 6 have started to rise in Key Stage 2 in mathematics. Pupils' handwriting and presentation have improved across the school through systematic training for teachers and robust monitoring by school leaders.

Attainment gaps that have developed because of past weak teaching are beginning to close, including for disadvantaged pupils. However, the school's own assessments indicate disadvantaged pupils' attainment for the current Year 6 still remains lower than that of other pupils nationally by about two terms. The school's evaluation and the pupil premium review identified the need to strengthen interventions for these pupils. However, some inconsistencies remain in the quality of help provided, including by teaching assistants, and this prevents pupils making fast enough progress.

Provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs has been revised, although it is too early to see the full impact on attainment. Low attaining pupils' progress in reading has started to improve, due to the systematic teaching of phonics (the links between letters and sounds) in Key Stage 2. However, these pupils are not heard often enough reading to an adult on an individual basis in some classes. This restricts their progress. This provision, as well as interventions for helping pupils making up lost ground, has yet to be thoroughly monitored across the whole school.

Pupils behave well in and around the school. Leaders have ensured that staff apply the school's behaviour policy effectively. Trends in behaviour for individuals and

groups are carefully evaluated, recorded and acted upon. The new curriculum greatly interests pupils and they make every effort to do their best. They show enthusiasm for learning and work hard to tackle their tasks. Pupils get on well together and there is a strong sense of community.

The review of governance was carried out in July 2014. It recommended that governors should reorganise so they employ their skills in monitoring achievement more effectively. Governors are now attached to year groups and make regular visits to the school. They rightly trust the work of school leaders and demonstrate that they look for evidence to substantiate the school's view of itself. For example, they have checked handwriting and presentation across the school to ensure weaknesses are being put right. However, the school improvement plan does not show precise enough information about how governors will monitor and evaluate the school's work, including for named governors to carry out specific tasks. Governors are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement from national and school assessments, including for different groups such as the disadvantaged pupils in receipt of government funding. They have fully supported the headteacher in holding teachers to account and ensuring pay is linked to performance.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- the headteacher has high expectations and sets high standards for teaching and learning
- all leaders, staff and governors have a strong common purpose to ensure this school becomes the best it can be
- the new curriculum is vibrant and there is systematic teaching of literacy and numeracy whilst ensuring one subject underpins another
- the performance of staff is well managed and has been effective in promoting improvement
- teachers new to the school are well supported and, consequently, they get off to a good start
- marking of work is a strength and helps pupils to correct their mistakes.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- teachers do not consistently help pupils to apply phonics when writing so their spelling is not improving quickly enough
- pupils in some classes do not have enough opportunities to write at length
- the reading scheme for lower attainers in Key Stage 2 is not sufficiently tightly structured to provide continuity from Key Stage 1.

External support

The school continues to receive effective external support. This has been particularly effective for subject development for teaching writing, governor training and for promoting links with two outstanding schools, including a national teaching school.