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Mrs Tracey Peacock
Headteacher
Normanton Altofts Junior School
Ash Tree Gardens
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Dear Mrs Peacock

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Normanton Altofts Junior School, Wakefield

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 November 2013. 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 the targets for improving boys' progress in writing are shared with governors so that they can check that the school is on track to become good
- make sure that where appropriate teachers have opportunities to develop their good practice further so that it leads to outstanding learning for pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, a group of governors including the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last

inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and information about pupils' progress in writing was considered.

Context

Since the inspection, the Chair of the Governing Body has stepped down and two other governors have resigned. A new Chair was elected very recently and one new governor has been appointed. Elections of parent governors are currently underway. The local authority's school improvement officer is new to the school and began working with senior leaders in January 2014.

Main findings

The implementation of strategies to improve the teaching of writing, introduced prior to the inspection, has been sharpened. Senior leaders have focused on a number of areas such as ensuring that learning objectives are clear, and that activities are both designed to meet these as well as pitched at the right level for pupils of varying abilities. There has been an increased emphasis on breaking learning down into small steps and making sure pupils know what they are aiming to achieve. Cross-curricular topics, often the context for writing tasks, have been reviewed and some changes made to ensure that these are more engaging, especially for boys. A range of training has been provided for staff and new schemes of work for teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar devised for each year group. Around the school, displays celebrate pupils' successes in writing, highlighting the key features of various genres. Rewards for writing are providing added motivation for pupils. The positive impact of these strategies is evident in the school's most recent assessment data. These show that in all year groups progress in writing has accelerated and is more rapid than expected nationally for both boys and girls.

Improvements to the systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' learning have been made. A calendar of monitoring activities is now in place and these are targeted more specifically on the features of practice being developed, including through training. Weaker areas identified, for instance through lesson observations, are followed up more systematically.

The school improvement plan encompasses the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection as well as some areas which the school has identified as in need of development. Timescales and methods of checking on progress are included. Some success criteria are quantifiable although not enough detail is provided for some aspects to enable the governing body to check efficiently on the school's progress.

Attendance continues to be monitored closely and the school works with the families of the few pupils whose attendance is below average. The school has given parents considerable notice of the introduction next academic year of fixed-penalty notices when pupils' absence is the result of term-time holidays.

Since the inspection there has been a review of governance and an action plan based on the findings is being drawn up. An audit of governors' skills is underway and there are plans for further training once this is completed. Governors feel that the headteacher keeps them well informed but recognise that they need better ways of checking on the school's work for themselves. They are putting together a programme of visits for the summer term and considering the protocols for such visits. The headteacher is planning a change to the structure of her termly report to the governing body in order to provide governors with more prompts and opportunities to ask challenging questions.

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

Senior leaders value the support provided by the local authority's school improvement officer. Support is well structured with an emphasis on refining systems and procedures so that these are more tightly focused on raising achievement. The review of governance provided by the local authority is helping governors identify better ways of working and effective methods for holding the school's leaders to account.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director, Children and Young People, for Wakefield.

Yours sincerely

Jane Austin
Her Majesty's Inspector