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Kim Baker
Headteacher
Blakenall Heath Junior
Field Road
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Dear Mrs Baker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blakenall Heath Junior

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 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:

- build on the improvements in teaching by giving staff more regular opportunities to share effective practice
- ensure the standard of pupils' work in a range of subjects matches that of English and mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, and other senior leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met briefly with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. A range of documentation was reviewed

including the Chair of the Governing Body's written report on the impact of the work of governors, the latest information about pupils' achievement, feedback to staff following lesson observations and reviews of pupils' work. You and the deputy headteacher joined me on brief visits to classrooms to review writing and mathematics activities and to talk to pupils about their learning. We also reviewed some pupils' science and topic work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in January 2013, the headteacher and four teachers have left the school. In September 2013, the governing body appointed four class teachers. You became the headteacher in January 2014. In April 2014 the governing body appointed a deputy headteacher.

Main findings

You are providing strong and determined leadership. You have successfully established a 'no-excuses' culture across the school. All pupils are expected to achieve well. You and the deputy headteacher have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement. Together with other senior leaders, you both identify the exact reasons why pupils are not making good progress and ensure appropriate and prompt action is taken to help pupils succeed. Your latest assessment information shows that across the school, rates of progress are accelerating with increasing proportions of pupils making good progress.

Your records confirm that teaching has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Work in pupils' books shows that teachers are increasingly planning activities that provide pupils of different abilities with a suitable level of challenge. During our brief visits to lessons we observed teachers carefully explaining how to complete activities; providing pupils with clear and precise guidance during the lesson; and encouraging pupils to use the correct vocabulary when answering questions. Pupils I spoke with stated that behaviour in lessons has improved. In all the classes we visited, pupils responded promptly to instructions and demonstrated positive attitudes to learning.

Individual teachers are developing and refining the strategies they use to help pupils in their classes learn more effectively. Some teachers are particularly strong at providing pupils that need extra help with tailored resources. Others give pupils specific guidance so that pupils can accurately identify what they need to do next to improve their work. Opportunities for teachers to share these strategies with each other are underdeveloped.

You have rightly placed a strong emphasis on raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. You recognise that the standard of pupils' work in other areas of the curriculum, although rising is not as high as in English and mathematics.

To address this imbalance, you and the deputy headteacher have started to make suitable changes to the curriculum.

With effective support from you and the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders are successfully leading improvements in the subjects and aspects of the school's work for which they are responsible. They have a good understanding of the achievement of different groups and the actions required to continue raising pupils' achievement. You and the deputy headteacher are working alongside the other senior leaders to help them develop the skills required to check regularly the work of staff.

The members of the governing body have responded positively to local authority training. Consequently, they have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors are providing you and other senior leaders with an appropriate level of support and challenge. During regular meetings and visits to the school, they ask pertinent questions. Members of the governing body are now carefully checking the impact of the senior leaders' actions on the achievement of different groups of pupils.

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 school's adviser has provided you, staff and the governing body with effective support. The local authority has undertaken three reviews of the school's work since February 2014. These reviews, alongside the school adviser's reports accurately identify what the school needs to do to continue improving. Training and support from a mathematics consultant has helped to strengthen teaching in this subject. Similarly, training for governors has had a positive impact on the work of the governing body. You and the deputy headteacher are continuing to build links with successful schools so that teachers can continue to improve their practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi

Her Majesty's Inspector