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14 November 2014

Ms Elizabeth Davison
Headteacher
Thornton Primary School
Thornton Road
Thornton
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD13 3NN

Dear Ms Davison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornton Primary School, Bradford

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 recent improvements in teaching and learning leads quickly to sustained and accelerated progress by pupils
- Ensure the effective induction of new staff so that these recent improvements become embedded in all staffs' practice
- continue to develop stronger partnerships with parents so that they have greater confidence in the quality of education the school is providing

Evidence

During the visit, I met with the headteacher and senior leaders, a group of pupils, middle leaders, governors and representatives of the local authority. I evaluated a range of documentation including the school improvement plan and data tracking pupils' progress. In addition I undertook a tour of the school, visiting classrooms, talking with staff, speaking with pupils and looking at their work.

Context

The school has had a significant number of new staff and has restructured the leadership teams since the last inspection. Nearly half of the teaching staff and some support staff are new to the school. More appointments are to take place from January 2015.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, the school has had another set of poor results in the national tests. You and your senior leaders have a clear understanding of the significant challenges the school faces and the urgency required to address them. You have responded with well targeted actions focused on improving outcomes for pupils. The plan of action focuses on the areas for improvement from the recent inspection report, with a clear allocation of key staff and governors responsible for monitoring the progress being made by the school. The success criteria are clear and succinct with a strong emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning along with accelerating the progress the pupils make.

The work carried out by yourself and other senior and middle leaders and staff to improve the school has continued since the inspection. You have built on the work you started before the last inspection, sharpened your focus and involved key people, including new staff, in the process. You have fostered a change in the culture of the school. Staff now feel they are well supported, they are better able to support each other and have a shared understanding of what needs to be done to improve. The school has had a significant number of new staff since the last inspection. As a result some parents and pupils have raised concerns about disruption to pupils' learning both before and since the last inspection. The school recognises the need to carefully monitor this situation to ensure that the recent changes and improvements are sustained and lead to better outcomes for pupils. Work to develop more effective partnerships with parents and carers has been started but more work is required to gain their full confidence and to maximise their role in supporting their child's learning.

Staff and pupils report that the school has been transformed since the last inspection. This is because actions being taken are beginning to make a difference in the classrooms. Actions taken include:

- reviewing the way marking and responses to pupils' work can help them better understand the next steps they need to take to improve their learning

- improving teachers' understanding of how to support and promote effective learning and behaviours that support learning in lessons
- a comprehensive review of the curriculum to identify opportunities to make learning more relevant, challenging and engaging.

Parents now have more opportunities to get involved through the establishment of a parent forum and a new approach to homework which promotes engagement. You have enhanced middle and senior leaders roles and sharpened their practice which has meant that planned actions are monitored promptly and robustly. Pupils say that their learning is more engaging and exciting, they have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and more opportunity to talk about their learning in lessons. Teachers are clear about the next steps they need to take to improve their practice. This is because the school has an effective appraisal process in place for all staff. Targets are focused on the school improvement priorities and the progress that children make in their learning.

Governors know the school well. They understand the challenges the school is facing, along with the need for rapid and accelerated improvement, and have taken appropriate steps to support the school leadership to address this. Governors have committed to a full review of their strengths and areas for improvement to further enhance their role. As a result an action plan is in place to increase their capacity. Governors recognise the disruption that the turnover of staff has had and are committed to stabilising staffing capacity as a priority.

External support

The school has secured strong links within a local partnership of schools, including good and outstanding schools. This has contributed to an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. It has also provided support for teachers, including newly qualified teachers, and school leaders who are developing their roles.

The local authority has worked closely with school leaders to build their capacity to move the school forward quickly. The local authority monitors the progress the school is making on a regular basis. The level of support is appropriate to the needs of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy