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Debbie Forster
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Forster

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 May 2015, 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 December 2014. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met five representatives of the governing body as well as groups of teachers and the school's special educational needs coordinator. I held meetings with three groups of pupils. I made brief visits to six lessons with you and the deputy headteacher in which we looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning and progress. I met a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised its most recent self evaluation and the findings of external reviews of the school's use of the pupil premium and the effectiveness of governance.

Context

Since the inspection, the number of pupils on the school's roll has increased from 341 to 361. There have been no changes in staffing.

Main findings

You and your staff have made rapid progress in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection and previous weaknesses are becoming significant strengths of the school.

Following the inspection, you immediately made changes to the curriculum to ensure that subjects such as science, geography, history and religious education were covered in sufficient depth. In addition, you also raised expectations with regard to the amount of writing pupils are expected to produce in these subjects. As a result, the quality of pupils' written work in the foundation subjects has improved very significantly. The majority of pupils I spoke to welcomed the increased focus on writing because, they said, they can see it is making a difference. In discussions, pupils could identify confidently and accurately the specific ways in which their writing has improved. Pupils have noticed that the same high expectations their teachers have with regard to their achievement in English and mathematics are now matched in all their subjects and, as a result, they are trying even harder to do their best in all curriculum areas. They know that their teachers now mark their topic work with the same rigour as their work in English and mathematics.

Strategies to strengthen teachers' marking have made a real difference. Teachers now mark work regularly and diligently in all subjects, as well as in English and mathematics. Pupils have quickly got into the habit of responding to their teachers' comments, for example, by correcting their work, explaining their ideas more clearly, or responding to challenging questions. Pupils I spoke with were all able to point to examples of how they had improved their work as a result of their teachers' marking. The increased emphasis on correcting pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar is having a real impact in improving the accuracy of their written work and their confidence in spelling high frequency as well as tricky words.

The school's systems for checking the quality of teaching in all curriculum areas are much stronger. Senior staff now apply the same rigour in monitoring the foundation subjects as they do in English and mathematics. Lesson observations and drop-ins are accompanied by regular and thorough scrutiny of pupils' topic work and teachers' marking, and teachers now receive individual feedback which identifies strong features of their practice and how they can improve. Subject leaders have received additional training to increase their skills and expertise in monitoring the quality of teaching in their subject areas. The less experienced subject leaders are supported by senior staff in carrying out their roles.

Following the inspection, the school immediately commissioned an external review of its use of the pupil premium. This review endorsed many aspects of the school's

approach to supporting disadvantaged pupils. Nevertheless, the school has made good use of the review to sharpen its practice further. Clear and measurable success criteria enable leaders and managers to check very accurately that the additional funding is being used well. School data indicate that gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally are closing rapidly. In many cases, for example, in reading and mathematics in Year 6, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than their peers. This is because the funding is used very carefully to tackle the specific needs of individual pupils, including through one-to-one tuition and working in small groups with well-trained support staff.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are also receiving more effective support than before. The special educational needs coordinator has made important changes to provision for pupils with special educational needs. Assessment procedures are more rigorous and have resulted in a reduction in the number of pupils identified on the special educational needs register. The individual plans made to support pupils have been strengthened because they now take into account the individual pupil's views. The special educational needs coordinator has audited the school's curriculum to ensure that it fully meets the needs of all groups of pupils. She has also introduced a range of strategies to boost pupils' achievement, for example in phonics (letters and the sounds they make), reading and mathematics. Each of these actions is monitored very rigorously to make sure they are working.

The strong and committed team of governors are playing a key role in bringing about improvements. Governors have made good use of the external review of their work, commissioned after the inspection, to ensure that they are supporting and challenging the school sufficiently well. Following the review, governors devised their own action plan and the actions taken have already strengthened their skills and confidence in holding the school to account very significantly. Governors regularly visit the school to gather first hand evidence of the quality of the school's work. They now have a clear understanding of their roles and how they should fulfil them.

The improvements made since the inspection have placed significant demands on staff. Your skilful leadership, with good support from the deputy headteacher, has ensured that morale has remained high since the inspection and that all staff are equally determined that the school is judged to be at least good when it is next inspected.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided appropriate support since the inspection, including thorough guidance on producing an effective action plan and in checking the

accuracy of the school's judgements about the quality of teaching. The local authority also brokered the external reviews of governance and the pupil premium which have taken place.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Lincolnshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector