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12 June 2015

Mr Paul Lonsdale
Headteacher
Dene House Primary School
Manor Way
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 5RL

Dear Mr Lonsdale

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Dene House Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 June 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 which 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 which took place in December 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 the 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, the Corporate Director: Children's and Adults' Services for Durham and as below.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

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

- Further improve the quality of teaching in all key stages, so that it is at least consistently good, in order to increase achievement rapidly in all subjects, especially by the end of Year 2, by:
 - ensuring the highest expectations of all pupils so that they are challenged to achieve as much as they are capable of, especially the most able
 - further improving the teaching of letters and the sounds they make (phonics), so that work always matches pupils' varying abilities
 - continuing to refine the new approaches adopted to the teaching of mathematics and writing, so that remaining weaknesses in pupils' skills are tackled promptly
 - providing more opportunities for children in the early years to investigate, explore and 'have a go', so that they are well prepared for learning in Year 1
 - improving the quality of marking, so that pupils are always clear about the next step they need to make to improve.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - developing the roles of new middle leaders and ensuring that all middle leaders have the necessary skills to check on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and so contribute effectively to driving school improvements forward
 - ensuring that the school's plans for improvement include clear actions and timescales, which allow the impact of improvements on pupils' learning to be measured and evaluated fully
 - ensuring that the pupil premium is used to good effect to ensure that the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally close quickly.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 11 June 2015

Evidence

The inspector observed the work of the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning in phonics (the sounds that letters make), writing and mathematics. The inspector scrutinised documents including the school's single central record, the school action plan, current data on the attainment and progress of pupils, the new calculations policy and records of the school's checks on the quality of teaching. The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics, four members of the governing body and the school's improvement partner. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a representative of Tudhoe Learning Trust.

Context

There have been a number of changes since the last monitoring inspection. The Key Stage 1 leader has left the school. Leadership responsibilities have been reorganised and four new phase leader posts have been filled by existing staff. An additional counsellor has been appointed. An academy order has been passed for the school to join Tudhoe Learning Trust. The school's plans to become an academy are progressing well.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

There are signs of improvement in the work of the school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a clearer view of pupils' achievements. The quality of teaching is improving and, as a result, most pupils are making better progress. However, not enough of the most able pupils are making the progress of which they are capable. In addition, the gap between the attainment of the pupils who are entitled to support through the pupil premium and the other pupils in school is not closing fast enough. Leaders now make more rigorous checks on teaching. The school's action plan to ensure improvement is now fit for purpose.

The middle leaders with responsibility for English and mathematics now have a much bigger monitoring role and, as a result of training and support, are having a greater impact on school improvement.

Governors hold the school's leaders to account with increased rigour. They now challenge senior leaders during monthly scrutiny group meetings and subject leaders during regular visits. Governors also challenge the pupil progress data that is presented by senior leaders and have an increasing awareness that overarching data for whole year groups can mask underachievement by individual pupils.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Pupils are making better progress in the acquisition of phonic skills (the sounds that letter make). Teachers have a better understanding of each child's phonic knowledge and adapt their planning to ensure that more rapid progress is made.
- Teachers have a much better understanding of how to secure improvements in mathematics because the middle leader for mathematics has developed a comprehensive progression in calculations policy. Although, only adopted in March, the impact can be seen in pupils' workbooks.
- Teaching assistants are more accountable for pupil progress. They have a greater knowledge of pupils' attainment and progress because they now attend the half termly meetings in which pupil progress is discussed and analysed.
- Leaders have a better understanding of the impact or lack of impact that specific interventions have on pupil progress. Middle leaders told the inspector that the tracking of the impact of intervention activities is no longer a 'paper exercise'.
- The quality of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils is improving. Pupils very much appreciate the time teachers give them to correct their work or to complete a challenge to improve their work and make it better.
- The standard of handwriting and presentation has improved recently because of action undertaken by the subject leader for English. Pupils now take part in short, daily handwriting sessions.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The standards that pupils reach in writing remain stubbornly below average in reading and mathematics throughout the school. Leaders have not acted swiftly enough to address the lack of opportunities for the pupils to write at length, especially for pupils in Key Stage 1. Pupils do not always know what high quality writing looks like because there are so few examples of pupils' writing for them to look at and read in their classrooms.
- There are emerging signs that the gap between pupils supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding) and those who are not are beginning to close. However, the gap is not closing at a rapid enough rate.
- Teaching is improving but is not yet consistently good across the school. The school is implementing a range of 'non-negotiables' for teachers but this is at a very early stage of development. Pupils do not make good progress in those lessons which are poorly planned and in which incidences of low-level disruption are not immediately addressed.

- The rigour with which the quality of teaching is checked is improving. Leaders identify the support that teachers require to improve but do not yet set time timescales for improvements to be made. Leaders do not always deliver challenging feedback on the quality of teaching robustly enough.
- Provision in the early years, although much improved, is still developing. Staff have a deeper understanding of assessment through the work of the local authority's consultant teacher. Although, leaders are aware of the current good level of development of the whole class of children, they do not yet measure the good level of development of boys, girls and disadvantaged children separately.

External support

The local authority continues to provide a great deal of support to the school, especially in the development of the provision in the early years. In addition, the school is being supported by the Tudhoe Academy Trust in anticipation of becoming part of the trust at the beginning of July 2015.