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Mrs Cathy Draper
Executive Headteacher
Short Heath Junior School
Pennine Way
Willenhall
West Midlands
WV12 4DS

Dear Mrs Draper

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Short Heath Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 20 November 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 April 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and the head of school, the chair and one other member of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. Short visits were made, with the executive headteacher and head of school, to all classrooms to talk to pupils, to observe their learning and to look at the work in their books. Documents were examined, including records of checks made on the quality of teaching; information about pupils' attainment, progress and attendance; and minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in April, the interim head of school has taken up the post on a permanent basis. Three teachers have left the school. Two new teachers, one of whom is an assistant headteacher, have been appointed. Two additional teachers, employed by the federation in another of its schools, have joined the school. One teacher left the school earlier this term. Pupils in this class are currently being taught by the head of school until their new teacher takes up post in January. During this period, you are providing additional leadership capacity by allocating more of your time to Short Heath than to the other schools in the federation: Rosedale Church of England Infant School and Lane Head Nursery.

Main findings

The early impact of leaders' actions, noted at the time of the section 5 inspection, has been largely sustained. You and the head of school are driving improvement with relentless determination and focus. Your actions have secured greater stability in staffing and are leading to better teaching, learning and assessment. This in turn is leading to better progress for some pupils. This is still not the case for all pupils because some teachers have not sustained the effective practice of which they are capable.

The action plan for the school sets out in detail what actions will be taken to address the issues identified at the section 5 inspection. Milestone measures are included which help leaders identify whether improvement is happening at the planned rate. These measures are effectively used by governors to hold you and the head of school to account for the progress being made. A link governor visits the school at least once each half term to check the impact of the action plan, for example by looking at pupils' learning or by interviewing subject leaders.

You have implemented rigorous systems to hold staff to account for pupils' progress. These are helping teachers and teaching assistants to accept responsibility for improving pupils' outcomes. Nevertheless, teachers remain cautious about making secure judgements using the assessment system. This leads to tracking that shows an unduly negative picture for some classes. Some pupils are making better progress than the data indicate. However, for some pupils progress is still too slow.

Since the inspection in April, you and the head of school have provided appropriate training to increase teachers' skills in teaching mathematics. Additional training has been given to teachers whose general teaching skills needed to improve. You check regularly whether this training is making a difference by talking to pupils about their learning, looking at their work and observing in lessons. Your records show that this made a notable difference between April and July. During this period, pupils' progress was more consistently strong than had previously been the case. However, some remaining staffing instability since then is one reason why there has been a

dip in teaching quality for some classes since September. Leaders have taken decisive and effective action to halt this decline.

While teaching is strong in many classes, teaching continues to be variable because some teachers are not consistently adhering to agreed expectations of quality. For example, some pupils' books are untidy. Teachers do not always insist on high standards of presentation. They accept untidy handwriting and messy crossings out. This does not encourage pupils to take pride in their work. Some teachers do not expect pupils to spell words correctly or use accurate punctuation in some pieces of writing. For example, in one book, a pupil had written the same name with no capital letter on several consecutive pages. While the teacher had circled this on the first page, no action had been taken to ensure that the error was not repeated.

Teachers have adopted an agreed approach to marking pupils' work. In some classes, this is having a notable impact on pupils' progress. However, some teachers are not using the agreed approach effectively. As a result, some pupils' progress is slowed because their misunderstandings are not being tackled effectively.

Attendance for all pupils has improved. While a few are still absent too often, leaders are working closely with the families of these pupils to ensure that their attendance continues to improve. For example, leaders do not authorise absence during term-time for holidays.

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

You have brokered relevant external support to tackle the weaknesses identified by the section 5 inspection. For example, you have utilised support networks for mathematics and governance. Additional training has been bought in for assessment and curriculum development. Leaders keep the local authority well informed on changes to the school. The local authority closely monitors improvement by attending meetings of the governors' strategic improvement committee.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Walsall. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector