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Mrs Jo Potts
Acting Headteacher
Woodlands Primary School
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Dear Mrs Potts

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlands Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 December 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 March 2015. 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, in order to become a good school. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure that a rigorous focus on teaching and learning, and expert external support, accelerate pupils' progress and rapidly improve outcomes at Key Stages 1 and 2.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the associate headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A tour of classes was made with senior leaders. Monitoring and evaluation documents and examples of pupils' work were examined.

Context

Following the recent inspection, a local leader of education (LLE) from Townfield Primary, a good school, provided mentoring and support for the acting headteacher. This term, the LLE took up a senior post in the local authority and now monitors the school. A new associate headteacher has just started to work with school leaders for two days a week. She is the headteacher of an outstanding local school, Kirkby Avenue Primary, and is an LLE. Two acting deputy headteachers have been appointed to permanent posts. The headteacher post will be advertised in January 2016. Four teachers, including the mathematics leader, left at the end of the summer term. Five teachers started in September, including one newly qualified teacher who has resigned. New middle leaders have taken responsibility for reading, writing, mathematics and the creative curriculum.

Main findings

The acting headteacher, supported by the associate headteachers, has taken effective steps to begin making improvements to teaching and learning. Firm performance management has reduced the amount of inadequate teaching. Support plans for teachers have led to improved teaching in some cases. Lesson observation is more frequent and better structured, with a clearer analysis of strengths and areas for development and agreed actions. School evaluation shows a gradually increasing proportion of good or better teaching. Reviews of pupil progress are more frequent and more sharply focused on individual classes rather than year groups. This is resulting in closer scrutiny of individual pupils and more systematic checking of the progress made by underachieving pupils, including disadvantaged pupils.

In 2015, outcomes were poor. At Key Stage 2, attainment declined significantly, even though pupils' starting points were similar to the previous year. Pupils made inadequate progress in reading, writing and mathematics. At Key Stages 1 and 2, attainment was in the lowest 10% for pupils nationally in reading and writing. Outcomes in the national screening check for phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) in Year 1 declined for the third year and only 45% met the required standard, which is low. By contrast, outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage continued to improve and the proportion reaching a good level of development increased, though it remains below the national average.

School information indicates that current Year 6 pupils are making better progress towards their aspirational targets. The work in their books now, compared with the spring term 2015, shows that they are writing more extensively and with stronger purpose. Expectations are higher and more explicit. Marking provides a more detailed and accurate assessment of strengths and weaknesses and identifies what pupils need to improve. Current Year 2 pupils are attaining better in writing and mathematics but reading is weaker. Current Year 1 pupils are making faster progress in phonics and a higher proportion are on track to meet the required standard.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children are being taught the features of effective learning more explicitly, for example, to ask questions and to keep trying. A re-designed outdoor learning area is about to be built to provide more opportunities for imaginative play, problem-solving and investigation.

The teaching of phonics is better led and managed and a more systematic approach has been adopted. Sessions are more frequent and better planned, with more emphasis on new learning and less on the consolidation of previous learning. This has enabled pupils to acquire knowledge of letters and sounds more quickly.

Guided reading has been re-organised and is planned more consistently across the school, with a set time and more formal systems for assessment. It is too early to show impact.

The medium-term planning of writing is better organised, with more regular opportunities for extended writing and more in-depth assessment of pupils' strengths and weaknesses.

Improving the teaching of mathematics is a continuing priority. Leaders have introduced an assessment at the beginning of each topic to evaluate pupils' understanding and to plan teaching, followed by an assessment at the end of the topic. Staff development, including coaching of individual teachers, has focused on using and applying mathematical knowledge to solve problems. These strategies are at early stages of implementation.

A new approach and resources for foundation subjects have begun to improve the consistency and quality of planning and assessment of the wider curriculum. Pupils have more opportunities to present their learning to parents and governors in half-termly presentations by all year groups.

Middle and senior leaders are beginning to develop their roles effectively. As a result, the professional culture of the school is improving, with a stronger focus on teaching and learning.

The work of teaching assistants has been re-shaped. Revised contracts provide a better match of teacher assistant time to the school's needs. Redefined roles and responsibilities provide a clearer rationale for deployment to support academic learning and meet individual needs. Teaching assistants are having more impact but inconsistencies remain. Leaders plan to develop teaching assistants' knowledge and understanding of subject terminology.

Governors have taken effective steps to improve the quality and stability of leadership. Governors are developing a more detailed knowledge of the impact of school improvement by taking part in pupil progress meetings, looking at the evidence in pupils' work and attending their presentations.

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 acted effectively to support the school and the acting headteacher by providing additional funding, external support and monitoring of leadership. Associate headteachers provide valuable mentoring and support for the acting headteacher and offer a wider range of staff to help improve particular aspects of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell
Her Majesty's Inspector