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Mrs Stones
Aston Lodge Primary School
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Dear Mrs Stones

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Aston Lodge Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 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 June 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. The school should take further action to sharpen up the current ad hoc monitoring system so that information is gathered in a more coherent manner and specific areas can be revisited to refocus on key issues.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, executive headteacher, the governing body, middle leaders and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. We visited every classroom and scrutinised mathematics and writing books. I analysed a variety of documents, including the school improvement plan and evidence from your monitoring files.

Context

Since the last inspection, two members of staff are on long-term leave. The arrangement for the executive headteacher to be shared across two schools is now a permanent arrangement. There is a new Chair of the Governing Body.

Main findings

The executive headteacher and you are working hard to raise standards throughout the school, in spite of having a challenging year with staffing issues. The experienced executive headteacher is providing coaching and support to help you in moving the school forward. Together, you present as a strong team and are committed to developing staff at all levels to improve the quality of teaching and learning. You both agree that the previous report was an accurate picture of where the school was in June 2015.

Clear plans for improvement are in place. These are supporting work to move the school forward. Governors are involved in reviewing actions and ensuring that timescales are met. Middle leaders have detailed action plans which link directly into the main school development plan. Procedures could be tightened further by moving timescales forward and then building these into your ongoing monitoring plans.

Senior leaders are developing a termly system to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They are involving all teachers in analysing books, listening to pupils' views and scrutinising planning and assessment outcomes. They now have a detailed picture of each teacher's strengths and areas for improvement. This links to performance management and teachers are clear what they need to do to improve. Additional monitoring is carried out on an ad hoc basis which diminishes the ability of leaders to quickly identify what is working well, or where further action is required.

The new assessment system is now fully in place and has given leaders a baseline from which to measure pupils' progress. Staff are assessing pupils' attainment regularly, enabling leaders to check ongoing progress in every class. Teachers are using assessment when planning, and therefore work is now matched more closely to the needs of the pupils.

Disadvantaged pupils are now being identified and tracked. Pupil progress meetings focus on this group of pupils and closely monitored interventions are used to target pupils at risk of underachieving.

The quality of work seen in books shows that the majority of pupils are making better progress. However, work still needs to be done to ensure that the most-able pupils, or those who are struggling to keep up, are given work at the right level. In

one book, a pupil had achieved the writing criteria set for her in September but had been given exactly the same target in November. In another class, pupils were writing the Christmas Story onto lined paper, but no adaptations had been made for less-able pupils who struggled to fit their large writing between the narrow lines.

Marking and feedback are still developing. There is evidence that in some classes this is helping to improve outcomes and progress, but this is not consistent across the school.

Presentation and handwriting skills are improving and, by the end of Year 6, most pupils have developed a neat and fluent handwriting style. Whole school displays in corridors exemplify neat presentation, and pupils are encouraged to 'do their best'. Throughout the tour of the school, it was noticeable that many pupils had developed a poor pencil grip. This is something that needs to be addressed quickly and particularly in the younger year groups.

Middle leaders are picking out key areas in their subjects where pupils are not making as much progress and are taking steps to improve this position. The improvements made since September include: more clarity about key roles, a faster pace in lessons, a more coherent approach to school improvement and more frequent professional dialogue.

Governors are now holding leaders more accountable. They were fully aware of the issues highlighted in the report and have since carried out further analysis with leaders to support the school in moving forward. They have defined their roles more clearly and have specific responsibilities. The governor for oversight of pupils with special educational needs receives regular updates from the leader and meets regularly to check that systems are effective. The new chair is knowledgeable and enthusiastic in her role; she is working hard to ensure that newer governors develop the skills needed quickly.

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 knows the school well. It was instrumental in brokering the deal to secure the leadership with the executive headteacher. Officers have carried out a detailed review of what the school needs to do to improve and half-termly visits are planned to focus on ensuring these areas are addressed.

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

Yours sincerely

Janet Lunn
Her Majesty's Inspector