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Helen Spearing
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Spearing

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Leonard's Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 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 May 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:

- evaluate the actions identified in school improvement plans to determine which are having an impact and which need to be revised
- extend the role of middle leaders and ensure they are held fully accountable
- raise the level of challenge for all pupils, especially for the most able in mathematics
- ensure that teachers insist on the highest levels of presentation in pupils' work.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and subject action plans were evaluated. You joined me on brief visits to classes to talk to pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books. A number of documents were examined including records relating to safeguarding, governance, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the former headteacher has retired. You were appointed as headteacher in September 2015, having previously been the deputy headteacher. A vacancy still exists for a deputy headteacher and this will be advertised in 2016. The Year 5 teacher is, however, carrying out this role in an acting capacity until an appointment is made. The literacy, numeracy and special educational needs coordinators, are all newly appointed. One member of staff is currently on long term sickness absence. The local authority has commissioned external consultants and a local leader of education to support the school.

Main findings

You and the governing body have responded swiftly to the areas identified. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and progress is speeding up. All leaders, including governors, have devised clear plans for improvement. These plans cover the key issues raised at the previous inspection and set out precise actions with measureable success criteria. Timescales and termly milestones are clear and these are linked to your monitoring cycle. However, actions are not yet evaluated to determine which are successful and which need adjusting.

Most leaders are new to post. Through the local authority, you have commissioned external consultants to help you and your leadership team develop the necessary skills and add capacity. Training has been provided to help subject leaders analyse information relating to pupils' progress and carry out monitoring activities. Regular checks are made on the quality of teaching. You have been supported with some of these activities by external advisers to ensure that your judgements are accurate. Pupils' books are also checked regularly to determine the progress made in each class in English and mathematics. Improvements have been made to the learning environment, for example you have created a library area and central teaching area, for withdrawal groups. Changes to the way subjects are taught have also been introduced to help reduce the gaps in achievement between boys and girls. For example, boy-friendly topics have been planned to encourage and motivate boys to write more effectively and wider reading material made available.

Expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour have been raised and you have introduced 'non negotiables' with the staff. Teachers are increasingly held to account as you have sharpened the system for managing teachers' performance. Challenging targets are set and you are addressing weaknesses which exist in teaching. Class teachers are now fully involved in checking the information on pupils' progress. They have an increasing knowledge and understanding of how well pupils are achieving, in their respective classes. You hold regular pupil progress meetings with staff. This is to identify which pupils are on track to achieve the targets set, and which pupils need additional support. As a consequence, the role of teaching assistants has changed. Instead of being allocated to individual classes, support staff run programmes that provide extra help for individuals or small groups. The needs of lower ability and disadvantaged pupils are therefore being met more effectively.

The work sampled in pupils' books shows that progress is speeding up and as a result, standards are rising, especially at Key Stage 2. Most pupils are working at age-appropriate levels in reading, writing and mathematics in all year groups. Your own information shows that pupils in Year 5 are on track to achieve above average standards by the time they leave the school. The marking and feedback policy has recently been reviewed. Teachers pose additional questions or tasks to check pupils' understanding or offer advice on how to improve their work. Books checked show that the policy is generally used consistently, across the school. Pupils are increasingly confident in responding to the 'next step' requests made by teachers. Although teachers pay due attention to picking up pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling errors, their expectations of how pupils present their work is not always high enough. Worksheets are sometimes shoddily appended into exercise books and pupils do not always set their work out neatly, especially in mathematics.

Key Stage 1 pupils use their phonics (the link between sounds and letters) knowledge effectively, to support their writing. They sound out difficult words, and make phonetically plausible attempts. For example, during our visits to lessons we saw pupils in Year 2 making valiant efforts to spell tricky words like 'patiently' and 'gracefully'. Pupils' handwriting is generally neat and legible, but so far very few are allowed to use a pen. You are planning to address this in the spring term. Most pupils are confident when re-reading their work and they enjoy working with partners. In order to raise achievement in mathematics, greater attention has been paid to developing pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills. This is having a positive impact on pupils' engagement in lessons, as seen during our learning walk. However, the level of challenge for pupils, particularly for the most able, is not always evident in books and needs further development.

Although pupils' behaviour and safety was judged as good in the previous inspection, you have revised the behaviour policy to improve behaviour and safety still further. Pupils receive 'credits' for good work or good behaviour and these are exchanged for prizes. Many pupils are diligently saving these up to exchange their credits for a higher value reward. A 'time out' area has also been introduced but, already, the number of pupils needing to use this has significantly reduced, as

shown by your records. Pupils enjoy coming to school and as a result, attendance is above average.

In 2015, the proportion of children in the early years who reached a good level of development continued to be above the national average. The proportion achieving the expected level in the Year 1 phonics screening check was also above the national average. This is because reading is taught well from the outset. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 was similar to the previous year, and broadly average overall. However, attainment at Key Stage 2 fell in mathematics and pupils who left Year 6 underachieved in this area, especially the most-able pupils. In terms of other subjects, pupils made expected progress in writing but good progress in reading.

Governors acknowledge that leadership and management required improvement, prior to the inspection. They have taken on board the recommendations from the external review of governance and drawn up an action plan. They have begun to implement some of these actions and as a result, have a more strategic view of the school. They have also re-structured sub-committees and several governors visit the school on a regular basis to gather first-hand information. For example, the Vice-Chair meets regularly with the mathematics coordinator, and other governors work alongside pupils on creative activities. As headteacher, you provide governors with a range of information about pupils' progress, which is helping them to hold you to account. You now plan to extend this accountability to subject leaders so that they report to governors on the impact of their work.

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 been both supportive and responsive to the needs of pupils and leaders. They have commissioned support from external consultants to help develop the roles of governors, subject leaders and you, as a new headteacher. Ongoing effective support is available from a local leader of education, and moderation of teacher assessment is carried out with a local school. The local authority carry out termly visits to the school to keep a check on the progress being made. They rightly have every confidence in you and your leadership team.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector