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25 April 2016

Mr Garry Boote
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Dear Mr Boote

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutherland Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on April 13 2016, 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, pupils, parents and representatives from the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and a range of documents and policies were reviewed. Short visits were made to lessons in all year groups.

Context

Since the last inspection the school has had to tackle unexpected and significant disruption when their school building was closed under emergency measures, due to structural faults. As a result, the headteacher has been managing the move from the old school site to a temporary, contingency site while simultaneously planning for a scheduled move back to temporary buildings, to be followed by a further move to

permanent buildings on their previous site. To ensure that school improvement does not falter during this difficult time, governors have supported school leaders to build additional capacity in the leadership team. Consequently, temporary appointments have been made to enable greater delegation of responsibilities at middle leadership level. The school is due to become part of the Societas Multi-Academy Trust on 1 July.

Main findings

Despite the difficulties noted above, you, other school leaders and governors have refused to allow the situation to deflect them from driving forward the required improvements. The school's plans to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection are appropriate and are yielding positive results. Actions are identified for each area and these are being monitored closely to ensure that they secure the desired outcomes. However, we agreed that the plans lack separate success criteria which are supported by phased milestones to help leaders to demonstrate the impact of their actions even more quickly.

The new tracking system, introduced very quickly following the last inspection, is now an integral part of the school improvement process, providing an increasingly useful tool for leaders to monitor, analyse and take action. Equally, the system is enabling governors to quickly see where the school is performing well and where further improvement is required. Consequently, governors, particularly through the scrutiny committee, challenge leaders much more robustly because they are armed with appropriate information that they can use to identify and challenge underperformance.

Leaders have developed a rigorous quality assurance system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. In addition to the formal performance management observations of teaching, there is a programme of informal drop-ins to classrooms, with a range of agreed focuses followed by regular feedback to teachers, focusing on continual improvement. Throughout the year, leaders have put in place a clear timeline for whole school moderation, regular scrutiny of pupils' work, pupil progress meetings, action planning meetings and opportunities to share good practice. As a result, outcomes for Year 6 pupils in 2015 were significantly better than those in 2014 and were above national averages. Although leaders have identified that attainment will not be as good this academic year, they are confident that they have maintained the improved rates of progress for all pupils, including the most able, from their different starting points.

We agreed that progress in the early years and key stage 1 is slower. Children enter the nursery provision with skills and understanding that are frequently lower than might be expected for their age. Consequently, very focused support to tackle these issues is required before progress can be made in the prime areas. We agreed that accelerating the school's plans to develop an approach to support precise

identification of gaps on entry would be useful, so that the progress children make in the nursery and reception can be more accurately measured.

Following the recommendations of the last inspection, you identified that teachers needed additional training to ensure that they were aware of the higher expectations of assessment and feedback and had the skills to ensure that pupils are always clear about what they need to do to improve their work and why. During this visit, pupils' work was scrutinised. Teachers' assessment and feedback was clearly compliant with school policy and was providing useful advice to pupils. Importantly, pupils' responses to such comments demonstrated the impact this is having on improving rates of progress.

Pupils and parents all say, and I agree, that teachers have increased their expectations of what pupils can achieve. The inspection evidence fully supports this, as it was borne out in nearly all classes visited. The new curriculum is being developed effectively and teachers plan for all pupils to achieve mastery of the concept being taught. In many classes, teachers were ensuring access to new learning through imaginative use of resources as well as making use of a range of approaches to best suit the needs of learners. Teachers also have notably high expectations for presentation. It is very clear that the vast majority of pupils take great pride in their work. One pupil explained that, 'we don't get rewards for scruffy work, you know.' Pupils are equally clear that rewards are about behaving well all the time and showing good attitudes to learning.

The review of the behaviour policy, with its greater focus on rewards and clarification of what behaviours will lead to sanctions, has been effective. Very little low-level disruption was seen during this inspection as a result. Pupils work hard in their lessons, well supported by both teachers and teaching assistants. They are eager to tackle tasks set and to do the best that they can because they have work which is set at the right level of difficulty.

You and your leaders have been keen to focus on developing pupils' resilience and ability to apply skills learned across the curriculum. There is evidence that this is having a positive effect on the quality of work produced in topic books, particularly in terms of literacy. However, we agreed that this should now be further extended to mathematics, for instance by ensuring that pupils use their literacy skills to tackle word problems in maths.

The school's work to support all pupils to achieve their potential has been enhanced by the introduction of philosophy for children which is threaded through the curriculum. Pupils speak enthusiastically of the debates and discussions they have about learning, the world around them and how to keep safe. All pupils, including the youngest, can talk about how the school helps them to stay safe and what they can do if they have a problem. The school's procedures for safeguarding are robust and, when pointed out, some inadvertent omissions in the published safeguarding policy were very quickly rectified and supporting evidence supplied.

Inclusion is a key part of the school's work and you are currently awaiting 'attachment aware school' status as a result of the emotional coaching programme that has been established. The success of this initiative has led to you supporting other academies in the area to implement a similar programme.

The school's work to support parents, as well as pupils, throughout the disruption of moving from the previous building and transporting pupils to and from their homes has been excellent. Parents are very appreciative of your efforts to ensure that routines are maintained, that access to teachers and leaders is made available and that they have been given opportunities to have their views heard at a difficult time. As a result, they are very confident that the upcoming moves will be dealt with equally effectively and that their children's education will not be disrupted.

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 school has received a range of effective support through its partnership with the six primary academies which will form the multi-academy trust in July. Teachers have been able to visit other academies to observe good practice in action and to undertake joint assessment of pupils' work.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Stoke-on-Trent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector