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Dear Mr Newby

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howard Park Community School

Following my visit to your school on 21 April 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 July 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that leaders are making full use of the different checks they make on teaching and learning to ascertain if their actions to improve are having the impact needed
- make sure governors are involved formally in monitoring and evaluating actions to improve
- providing professional development opportunities for middle leaders to sharpen and develop their leadership skills.

Evidence

During the inspection meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to

discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans and the school's system for checking pupil progress were evaluated. A learning walk was conducted jointly with you, during which books were reviewed and discussions were held with pupils. Other documents were scrutinised including governor information and external plans for support.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have been appointed as the new headteacher. You took up post in September 2015. Senior and middle leaders now have defined leadership roles and responsibilities.

Main findings

You wasted no time when you started as headteacher. You responded very quickly to the areas which needed to improve and prioritised them correctly. This resulted in detailed action plans which focus on the areas which were identified at the previous inspection. It is very clear that you demonstrate a determination to raise standards quickly at Howard Park.

You rightly identified that alongside the areas for improvement, you needed to ensure that the behaviour of some pupils needed to rapidly improve as this was having serious implications on the learning of other pupils as well as the well-being of staff. Furthermore, you correctly identified that pupils' attitudes to learning are key when making improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. During my visit, the school was a calm and purposeful place where pupils can learn and develop in a stimulating environment. This is because you have raised teachers' expectations of what is acceptable behaviour around the school and in classrooms. You have also improved and clarified the systems that underpin and encourage good behaviour and acted quickly to ensure that pupils who are struggling either socially or academically receive prompt and effective support. Pupils display enthusiasm for learning and thrive on positive reinforcement, such as the precious stone 'postcards' being sent home.

Leaders have successfully implemented a new presentation and handwriting system. This has had a significant impact on pupils' pride in their work. They can see that their efforts are paying off. It is clear to see from pupils' work that they are endeavouring to improve the presentation of their work, and their handwriting is improving rapidly. Parents are keen to support their children at home in this, and pupils talk about their work with enthusiasm.

Actions to improve standards in writing have started to be put in place. For example, pupils are given more time to write in a sustained manner, and time is set aside every day to improve pupils' knowledge of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

You are aware that teachers need further support and training to develop their

teaching of writing, and this should happen without delay. In addition to this, a new marking system has been implemented and this is currently being scrutinised by leaders. At the moment the new system is not being consistently applied and the impact of it is not being measured. Opportunities for pupils to improve their writing are missed because teachers have not identified how this can be done. This is hindering the progress pupils need to make and therefore needs to be addressed urgently.

You have established a strong sense of purpose within your leadership team. You are giving them the chance to prove themselves as leaders, and are empowering them to make a significant contribution to school improvement. It is clear that most of them share your determination and drive and that they have the necessary skills. It is vital, therefore, that your leaders are given professional development opportunities to harness and focus their skills so that they can support you further in your ambition to succeed. This will then ensure that leaders' monitoring and evaluations will be rooted in evidence from a range of sources.

An audit of governors' skills was undertaken as a result of the previous inspection. This has helped the governors in their planning. They have also received training so that they are increasingly more able to analyse information about the effectiveness of the school and challenge leaders. However, governors now need to focus their energies on developing a more strategic role, alongside their voluntary work in school. By developing a monitoring system which links directly to the school improvement plan, they will be able to monitor and evaluate the impact of the leaders' actions to improve standards.

External support

The local authority has provided support and challenge for the new headteacher, in addition to training and development for members of the governing body. A national leader of education has been brokered by the local authority to support middle leaders in the school. This area of support has been slow in starting and needs to begin without delay. A national leader of governance has enabled the governing body to formulate an effective action plan.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kirklees. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Lithgow

Her Majesty's Inspector