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Lesley Bowmar & Jane Parker
Partner Headteachers
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Dear Lesley Bowmar & Jane Parker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ironville and Codnor Park Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in September 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, I met with you and other leaders, three members of the governing body, including the chair, and the school improvement adviser from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited all classes, accompanied by you, and looked at work in pupils' books. I spoke formally with a group of older pupils and informally with others in class. I considered a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and action plans, training records, monitoring records, records of external advisers and minutes of the governing body meetings. I scrutinised the safeguarding policy and the single central record.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection, one member of staff has left the school with her work currently being covered by a temporary teacher. You have made a new appointment for this post for September. A new leader of mathematics recently took up post. One teacher in the early years has resigned her position and this post has been filled.

Main findings

Since the previous monitoring inspection, you revised the school's action plan so that it focused more closely on those areas most in need of improvement. This revised action plan set the strategic vision for the improvement of the school and has been key to ensuring that improvement has taken place at a steady pace. Teachers and teaching staff, including those who are new to the school, know what the key priorities are, and their role in ensuring that pupil outcomes improve. This has resulted in a culture of high expectations becoming more embedded across the school.

A carefully thought out programme of professional development for teachers has allowed teachers to reflect on their own practice and learn from each other and from good practice elsewhere. For example, teachers have visited other early years settings and have attended 'getting to good' seminars and as a result, have a clearer understanding of what good practice in this key stage looks like. Teachers I spoke with told me how much they valued the opportunity to be video recorded and to reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve.

It was clear from our joint observations and from the regular monitoring you carry out that you have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching across the school. You have made your expectations clear to teachers and teaching assistants, and in your regular learning walks, lesson observations and work scrutinies you check that these key elements are in place. For example, you check whether work is matched to pupils' needs, and you have a clear understanding of where this is accelerating the progress pupils make, and where further work needs to be done. The support you put in place for teachers focuses much more closely on their individual needs.

As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving across the school. In the lessons we visited, we saw evidence of teachers using what they know about pupils to ensure that work is at the right level. Teachers and teaching assistants used questioning successfully to gauge whether pupils had understood the learning and when they needed more support. Pupils I spoke with told me they appreciate the helpful feedback they get from their teachers, and the 'feed forward'

approach that encourages them to think about how to improve their work and extend their learning.

The new curriculum is ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to practise and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. For example, in the mathematics classes we visited, pupils were enjoying the challenge of using their fluency in mathematical operations and demonstrating their skills in reasoning and problem solving. In the Year 5 and 6 class, pupils were effective in using skills of inference to explain and justify their answers. There is more to do to ensure that all pupils are equally well supported and challenged. Some pupils told me that they found their work too easy, while some of the younger children needed clearer explanations to help them understand the concepts of one more and one less.

In the vast majority of classes we visited, attitudes to learning were positive and pupils were well engaged in their work. This was particularly evident in the Year 5 and 6 class, where pupils were engrossed in their silent reading. On occasion, when some pupils' attention wanders they are not refocused quickly enough. Some take too long to settle to their work or move on to the next task.

Attendance is improving and is now close to the national average. This is further evidence of your work to engage and work effectively with parents and carers. The workshops you have run for parents have been well attended and have ensured that parents are involved and engaged in their child's learning.

Pupils I spoke with told me they felt happy and safe in school, and are confident that this is true for all pupils, even those who are new to the school. They are certain that should any bullying occur, it would be dealt with quickly and effectively. They trust their teachers and other staff to listen to and deal with their worries and concerns.

You have introduced further checks on staff who work in the school and safeguarding policies and procedures now fully meet requirements. You have organised additional training for staff in safeguarding matters, so they are now more aware of all the risks that pupils are vulnerable to and are confident in reporting and responding to concerns. Governors monitor this aspect of your work carefully.

Outcomes are showing signs of improvement. In 2015, attainment at key stage 2 was close to or above national averages in all key subjects, and almost all pupils made the progress expected of them. Disadvantaged pupils made similar rates of progress to their peers, and to other pupils nationally, although gaps between their attainment and the attainment of similar pupils remained wide. At key stage 1, attainment was in line with national averages for most pupils. This indicated that they had made accelerated progress since the end of the early years, when few of them had achieved a good level of development. In phonics and in the early years,

there is an improving picture of achievement moving closer to national averages. However, disadvantaged pupils are not keeping pace with other children in these classes. You ensure that a close focus is kept on these pupils and monitor their progress carefully, ensuring that the right support and intervention is put in place when their underachievement becomes evident. There is more to do to ensure that these pupils get off to the best possible start in the early years, and do not fall further behind their peers as they move up the school.

Governance

Since the previous inspection, governors have worked with local authority officers to identify their strengths and weaknesses and areas for further development. They have drawn up their own action plan in response to these findings. They have undergone much additional training, for example in the use of data, and ensure that they use this information to hold leaders to account for the progress pupils make. Governors take responsibility for monitoring different aspects of the school's action plan, and keep a close focus on the progress being made. At times, this focus is too close – for example, they check the impact of your actions through joint work scrutinies. These activities have helped them to have a good understanding of the school's curriculum and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school. However, they are aware that they now need to take a step back from this approach and develop greater strategic oversight of leaders' 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 provided ongoing support to leaders, governors and teachers. Through their regular visits, they check on the progress the school is making and adapt the support as necessary. For example, following staffing instabilities they provided additional support and challenge to early years leaders and have agreed to continue doing so while this area of the school continues to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Duignan
Her Majesty's Inspector