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Dear Mrs Lawton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longley School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 September 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2015 the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 the school's action plan precisely defines the impact that leaders' actions will have on pupils' progress
- ensure leaders give precise feedback to teachers about areas of their work that need further improvement
- support teachers and teaching assistants to increase their impact on pupils' progress in lessons, using a range of strategies matched to pupils' different levels of understanding.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, six members of the governing body, including the chair, a representative of the local authority and the national leader in education (NLE) currently commissioned by the local authority to support the school. I met with a group of teachers, and pupils on the school council. In the meetings we discussed the actions taken since the last inspection.

I made short visits to a range of lessons and longer visits to two lessons with the headteacher. I reviewed teachers' planning and work in pupils' books with the senior leadership team. I considered a range of documents; the school's action plan, and records of leaders' checks on the effectiveness of teaching and other aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding.

Context

Since the last inspection new governors have joined the governing body and a new chair of the governing body has been elected. A focused staff development programme and building refurbishments, linked to the school's changed designation, have continued.

Main findings

Since the inspection leaders and staff have worked with determination to move the school forward. The local authority has provided the support of an NLE, the headteacher from Ravenshall School. She has worked with the school to develop the skills of leaders and teachers through a bespoke programme of work.

Teachers talked enthusiastically about the 'good teaching better learning' programme and other developments in place. They appreciate the sensitive support they are given. Teachers now talk about every detail of their work and share with each other successful methods. This is having a positive impact on pupils' progress. Much training has taken place to increase the range of communication strategies staff use. As a result more pupils are benefiting from the use of picture-based communication systems and signing. Leaders recognise that further work is needed in this area and continue to work closely with the speech and language therapist provided by the National Health Service.

Pupils describe changes in the school since the last inspection. They still enjoy school and feel safe; as one pupil said, 'fighting happens as rarely as winning the lottery'. Pupils also describe how they are doing more in different subjects as well as English and mathematics.

A few pupils could give examples of how some teachers make it clear what they are going to learn in a lesson, for example converting fractions to decimals. However, work in pupils' books, visits to lessons and leaders' checks on teaching show that teachers are not consistently clear about how to ensure pupils know what it is they are going to learn in each lesson. This slows the progress of the pupils who do not understand what is being asked of them. Similarly, leaders' feedback to teachers lacks clarity about what needs to improve. Equally the school's action plan does not set out what leaders want to achieve in terms of pupils' progress. This means governors cannot easily check on whether the work leaders are doing is having the desired effect.

Governors now ask for more detailed information about pupils' progress. They recognise that they have to ensure a tight focus on the progress of current pupils, as well as plan for the future development of the school.

External support

Leaders appreciate the support provided by the local authority through the NLE. The training programme is proving effective in developing teachers' skills. Leaders and governors recognise the support the local authority is providing to develop the school's facilities. Leaders have visited other special schools which are achieving outstanding outcomes for pupils and they work with other leaders to learn from them. This work is supporting the improvements in the school.

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

Susan Hayter
Her Majesty's Inspector