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Ms Lindsay Taylor-Potts
Acting headteacher
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Dear Ms Taylor-Potts

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Walton Priory Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 10 June 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not 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 make sure that:

- the needs of all pupils with special educational needs or disability are quickly identified and appropriate teaching and provision put in place to support their learning
- the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is quickly closed, especially in reading and mathematics in key stages 2 and 3
- pupils in key stages 2 and 3 have sufficient opportunities to reason mathematically and solve increasingly difficult problems so that they are

- able to use their mathematical skills confidently, quickly and efficiently
- boys' writing skills are developed in key stages 2 and 3, with particular emphasis on composition
- leaders embed and evaluate a cycle of frequent and focused checks on the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress and use the results of this monitoring to hold staff to account for the progress of pupils in their groups
- governors hold all leaders to account and challenge staff about pupils' underperformance, particularly for pupils who are disadvantaged
- governors make sure that the school's website meets statutory requirements
- an external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium is undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, school leaders and governors including the chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. You showed me around the school and we visited classes in all year groups and across a range of subjects. During these observations, I spoke to pupils about their learning, work and progress and examined the work in their books. I also met with a representative from the local authority. I scrutinised a number of documents including the school's self-evaluation form and subsequent action plan, information about current pupils' progress and the notes of visits from the local authority.

Context

Since the previous inspection, you have been appointed as acting headteacher, replacing the previous executive headteacher. You were previously the school's deputy headteacher. You have made two appointments, a key stage 2 leader and a special educational needs coordinator. You have begun to reorganise the school's leadership structure.

Main findings

Leaders, including governors, have not acted quickly or effectively to address the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, the weaknesses in the effectiveness of leadership or pupils' underachievement, particularly of pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and disability. The quality of teaching remains inconsistent and pupils are not making the progress expected of them in key stages 2 and 3.

Some teaching is stimulating and engaging and helps pupils to do well. However, where teaching is ineffective, teachers fail to use the information they have about what pupils know and can do to plan appropriate learning activities that engage,

motivate and stretch the pupils. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Pupils often complete work that is repetitive and dull and does not encourage them to reason mathematically or to solve increasingly difficult problems. As a result, the majority of pupils are unable to use their mathematical skills confidently and efficiently. In addition, the more able pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to deepen or develop their knowledge and understanding in mathematics and other subjects in key stages 2 and 3.

Pupils' literacy skills across the school are not developed effectively. This is especially the case for boys' writing and their compositional skills in particular.

The school's assessment policy is not used consistently by teachers. As a result, a majority of pupils do not know how to improve their work or how to rectify their mistakes or misconceptions.

Pupils who have special educational needs or disability do not have their needs quickly and appropriately identified. As a result, teachers are unable to plan lessons that successfully meet pupils' needs and help them to do well. The gap between pupils who are disadvantaged and other pupils nationally is increasing, particularly in reading and mathematics. The school has received a warning notice from the Department for Education as a result.

You took up your post at the start of the summer term 2016. You demonstrate the skills and determination to make sure the school improves rapidly. You have acted quickly to identify and address the issues that are preventing pupils from doing well. You have reorganised the leadership structure and begun to put in place systems that will hold teachers and leaders to account. However, it is too early to see if these systems are wholly effective. Pupils with whom I spoke told me that 'things have really improved recently' and that 'lessons and assemblies are getting better'. The systems you have implemented must now be embedded and their effectiveness evaluated. Pupils' behaviour remains good overall. However, when lessons fail to engage their interest they can, at times, become disengaged and their learning slows.

Governors are determined for the school to do well and are ambitious for its pupils. However, governors have not successfully held leaders and teachers to account for the underperformance of pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged. In addition, they have not made sure that pupil premium funds are used appropriately to improve the progress of these pupils. Governors have been overly reliant on the information provided by the executive headteacher and have not sufficiently challenged the reasons given for poor performance. In addition, governors have not ensured that the school's website fully complies with statutory requirements. For example, they have not made sure that the school's information report on special educational needs or disability is on the website.

External support

The local authority visited the school in February 2016 and recognised that leaders, including governors, were not taking effective action. As a result, they issued a local notice of concern and put appropriate support in place. However, the effectiveness of this support has been hindered by the school not fully engaging with the support on offer. You are now working effectively with the local authority and James Bateman Junior High School to quickly improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the effectiveness of leadership and management and pupils' progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector