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Mrs Sarah Senior
Skelmanthorpe First and Nursery School
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Dear Mrs Senior

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Skelmanthorpe First and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 16 September 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 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016, 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 that weaknesses in assessment and teachers' professional development identified at the previous section 5 inspection have a higher priority in order for them to improve at a faster rate.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the two assistant headteachers and members of the governing body including the chair of the governing body. I also met with a representative of the local authority and the national leader of education who is currently supporting the school. All discussions centred on actions taken since the last inspection. Tours of the school to observe lessons, alongside the headteacher, occurred at different times during the school day. I took the opportunity where appropriate to speak to pupils about their work during these tours. Action plans, external evaluations, the outcomes of monitoring activities and information on pupils' progress were studied. Documentation relevant to safeguarding and child protection was also considered.

Context

You were appointed to your new role as headteacher on 1 September 2016. Since the last inspection there has been little change in staffing in the school and in the governing body. The two assistant headteachers have worked tirelessly to ensure that school improvement has continued during the change of headteachers. You have all quickly formed a cohesive team to speed up the rate of improvement and give consistency to leadership within the school. You and your governing body have applied to become part of a multi-academy trust with a group of schools that are in the pyramid of schools that you already work well with. It is expected that the national leader of education who is currently supporting your school will continue to do so, as they are expected to take on the role of chief executive officer of the new multi-academy trust. It was anticipated that this conversion to academy status would take place on 1 September 2016. However, this date has been moved to 1 October 2016. As discussed during the visit, there are still some outstanding matters to be agreed before this conversion can take place and therefore the date of 1 October may also have to be revised.

Main findings

Following the last inspection the leadership team quickly addressed issues such as presentation and handwriting. A baseline assessment of standards was completed in April 2016 and weaknesses identified. Interventions, reviews in staff meetings and the raising of expectations, as well as celebrating successes in assemblies, have enabled improvement. As the new headteacher, you have continued the good work started by your assistant headteachers and have created a list of 'non-negotiables', which include aspects of presentation. You have also organised a rigorous monitoring programme to ensure that standards in presentation continue to improve.

The need to ensure that reading time is more valuable in improving reading skills has been addressed well. The school has increased the time pupils spend reading with adults, particularly the least able pupils and pupils who have a disability or a statement of special educational needs. You have ensured that a specific time is spent targeting and improving pupils' reading skills, and guided reading sessions are more focused on learning. These improvements have had a direct impact on reading standards across the school and particularly in Year 5 where 50% of pupils were working at a greater depth in their reading skills by July 2016. Attainment in phonics in Year 1 in 2016 also exceeded that of other pupils nationally of the same age.

The previous inspection identified weaknesses in pupils' ability to apply their mathematical skills to reasoning and problem-solving tasks. The school has tackled this issue well with the introduction of a new commercial scheme and a programme of weekly sessions to improve pupils' application of mathematical skills. This provision is now well embedded and pupils demonstrate a greater confidence in their skills. Attainment in mathematics is improving and the numbers of pupils working at a greater depth is improving at a rapid pace. As the new headteacher, you are working alongside your assistant headteachers to carefully and rigorously monitor this improvement.

The previous leadership team identified that there were problems with the inefficiency of the assessment system in being able to track pupils' progress so that it usefully supports teaching and learning. A new tracking system is now in place. The change to the new tracking system has not been fast enough and therefore you do not have a clear picture of pupils' progress at the end of the summer term 2016. You have put in place regular pupils' progress meetings with teachers and a monitoring programme so that the usefulness and accuracy of the new system can be tested.

Other aspects of school improvement as identified at the last inspection have also not been acted on at a fast enough rate. Lesson observations and book scrutinies have taken place to improve the quality of teaching. However, these have not yet led to precise and personalised professional development plans for individual teachers. As a result, the quality of teaching has not improved quickly enough in all classes. This has resulted in differences in attainment across the school. At the end of Reception, the percentage of pupils gaining a good level of development increased considerably from previous years to well above that of other pupils nationally. This also demonstrated good progress for these pupils from their starting points. However, the percentage of pupils working at a greater depth in writing is below that of other pupils nationally at the end of Year 2, and in some year groups it is low. As the new headteacher, you have already implemented a highly structured system of monitoring that is intended to use all information gathered about the quality of teaching to bring about precise professional development plans.

External support

The school has been well supported since the last inspection by the local authority. The local authority procured the support of a national leader of education immediately prior to the last inspection and this support was increased following the inspection. This support has culminated in the drawing up of a focused action plan, which has helped the school focus on improvement during the period of change from one headteacher to another. Some aspects identified in this action plan have not improved fast enough. The school also works with a pyramid of schools, which has helped in improvement through sharing good practice and discussing aspects such as moderation and assessment.

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

Jo Sharpe
Her Majesty's Inspector