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Miss Alison Hopley
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Dear Miss Hopley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alderman Swindell Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 October 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 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:

- sharpen the school development plan so that it focuses on the areas which need improvement
- as a matter of urgency, ensure that a rigorous programme is drawn up and actioned to check the quality of teaching and learning in lessons and through pupils' work
- accelerate the progress of pupils in key stage 2, particularly in Year 4 for writing.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy, and three members of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I spoke with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions being taken to improve the school. I scrutinised a range of documents and visited lessons.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the age range of the school has changed. The school has its first Year 4 pupils, who will stay in the school until the end of Year 6. One teacher has left and not been replaced. The school has one newly qualified teacher, having completed her training with the school last year. There has been a restructuring of teaching assistant support in classes.

Main findings

Leaders have drawn up plans for improvement in response to the previous inspection report. However, these plans lack clarity and are not sufficiently focused on the key areas for improvement and how these will be addressed. Leaders are not evaluating the impact of actions sufficiently well and using this to inform their understanding of the progress that the school is making.

Leaders have not been sufficiently rigorous in checking on and improving the quality of teaching across the school. Since the previous inspection, leaders' monitoring of teaching has not been sufficiently regular, nor have they looked at pupils' work often enough to determine the progress pupils are making. As a result, leaders still do not have a sufficiently accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. When leaders have watched teaching, they have not reflected sufficiently on how effective teaching is in improving pupils' progress over time. Feedback given to teachers is often too focused on what teachers do in a single lesson and not how effective teaching is in ensuring that all pupils are making good progress. Leaders do not ensure that information from watching teaching and scrutinising pupils' work is used together with pupils' assessment information when carrying out half-termly pupils' progress meetings. This would help teachers and leaders gain a better view of what is working well and what is not. Leaders have yet to establish a programme for checking teaching and learning for the current year, because this has not been given sufficient priority. As a result, time has passed without systematic action being planned and action taken swiftly enough. Pupils in Years 3 and 4, some of whom are still working at low levels relative to their age, still require more precise support. In particular, leaders recognise that writing in Year 4, the pupils who will form the school's first Year 6 cohort, is particularly weak. However, not enough interventions have been put in place to accelerate progress for these pupils.

Governors have developed their roles and a number have carried out learning walks with leaders and provided helpful feedback. However, governors, too, still need a sharper focus on checking the progress that pupils are making more regularly, so that they can hold leaders to account more fully.

Most subject leaders are new to their posts. They have begun to draw up action plans to improve their subjects. Some have received helpful external training and support. Subject leaders are beginning to recognise the significant role that they need to play in improving pupils' achievement in their subjects.

The curriculum has been modified so that project sessions provide more opportunities for extending pupils' skills in writing. This is working well and ensures that pupils practise the skills learned in English lessons more frequently in other subject areas. However, leaders have not ensured that teachers provide greater challenge for pupils of differing abilities in subjects other than English and mathematics. This has not moved on from the time of the previous inspection.

Phonics sessions are well structured and support pupils' learning. They are well organised and the commercial scheme being used is helping pupils to develop their reading skills well. However, at times the pace of the session is too slow, so pupils are not making as much progress as they could.

Pupils remain well behaved as at the time of the previous inspection. They enjoy speaking with adults. Pupils spoken to during the inspection were enthusiastic about being at school and enjoy their lessons. They are sensible at lunchtimes and playtimes, and in lessons cooperate well with each other. This is because teachers are consistent in their expectations of good behaviour.

Teaching assistants have been reorganised so that they are used where most needed. They have received a range of training, for example in supporting pupils' speaking and listening, and consequently support pupils well. Of particular benefit is the weekly support provided by the deputy headteacher to further improve phonics teaching.

Improvements have taken place in the provision for the early years. Teaching in the Reception class is better because adults now provide good support for children. The learning environment has been improved with new furniture and displays which celebrate pupils' achievements. The staff have adopted a curriculum which takes into account the interests of children. As a result, tasks and activities are more closely tailored to meeting pupils' needs. The leader for the early years now checks on teaching across both classes more regularly so that there is greater consistency of approach between the Nursery and Reception classes. Meetings with all adults in the early years are used well to improve adults' skills and professional knowledge.

Safeguarding remains effective as at the time of the previous inspection. Checks on staff are carried out in line with regulations, and these are carefully recorded. Staff have regular training in keeping pupils safe, including recent 'Prevent' duty training around extremism and radicalisation. As a result, staff are very aware of signs that may indicate concerns, and are vigilant in looking out for these.

External support

The school has benefited from a good range of support provided by the local authority. This has included the provision of an improvement board last year, which has now ceased. The local authority has provided support for the early years and the school commissioned independent support for English and mathematics. This has helped the school in reviewing its practices and bringing about some improvements. However, the school has not always acted on the advice given swiftly enough. Further support is required for the school to become a good 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 Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maria Curry
Her Majesty's Inspector