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Ms Susan Stack
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Stack

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ripley Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 November 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders 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:

- all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve the expected standard in mathematics
- all teachers are providing high levels of appropriate challenge, particularly for the most able pupils, including disadvantaged most able pupils
- governors have the necessary training and skills to clearly identify the school's strengths and weaknesses so that they can hold leaders to account rigorously.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you as headteacher and with other senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were also evaluated. With you and the deputy headteacher, I

made visits to four lessons and spoke to pupils and looked at their work. I looked at a sample of pupils' books with the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher. I also reviewed school monitoring documentation and the action plans, written as a result of the external reviews of governance and pupil premium funding.

Context

Since the last inspection you have appointed a new deputy headteacher and a new assistant headteacher, who was previously employed as a middle leader. These members of staff took up their posts in September 2016.

Two new posts in middle leadership have been created and taken up by existing staff to undertake monitoring work. There are three 'professional partnerships', where two members of staff work part time in one role. A new chair of governors has been appointed and two further governors have resigned from their posts. This, combined with an existing vacancy, means that there are currently four vacancies on the governing body.

Main findings

You have taken appropriate action to improve the school since the last section 5 inspection. The pace of these improvements has continued to increase since September because you have been ably supported by the deputy headteacher.

You and senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have clear plans in place to address these. For example, you are aware of the need to challenge all pupils and for teachers to have high expectations. You and senior leaders have clearly communicated your clear vision of high expectations for all pupils. You are uncompromising in your expectations for the planning and preparation of lessons and quickly challenge staff who fail to deliver these. You have introduced the simple, but effective, strategy of 'a class on a page' which identifies individual pupils that you expect teachers to target both in their lesson planning and in the lessons themselves. This strategy is making a difference to the targeted pupils. You are clear that teachers should have high expectations of what all pupils can, and should be expected to, achieve. You have also successfully worked with pupils to develop their attitudes to learning and independence through the use of 'growth mindsets'. One boy told me that he had set himself a difficult problem in a mathematics lesson because he 'wanted to challenge himself'. This reflects the attitudes you promote of 'I can do it' and 'aiming high'.

In the lessons we visited, many pupils were working on activities that were appropriate for their ability and were challenging for them. However, in some lessons, not all pupils were sufficiently challenged and some of the most able pupils in Year 6 told me that they found some of the work 'too easy'. You are aware that this is the case and have already identified the need to share good practice from strong teaching elsewhere. You have advocated 'fluid groupings' in lessons so that pupils do not always work in the same groups; instead, they work in groups

according to their ability and skill in specific aspects of their learning. For example, one Year 6 group of pupils told me that they were working in a smaller group with their teacher to help them understand an aspect of their mathematics work that they had found difficult in the previous lesson. Pupils appreciate this opportunity and enjoy their learning as a result; they are proud of their achievements. Pupils are skilled in working things out for themselves. For example, one group of Year 3 pupils was keen to make use of 'working walls' to check their use of verb endings without support from the teacher.

The leadership of English and mathematics has improved since the last inspection. The deputy headteacher now oversees both English and mathematics across Years 3 and 4 and the assistant headteacher oversees both English and mathematics across Years 5 and 6. These members of staff work collaboratively and support and challenge each other to maintain a clear focus on the progress of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. There is a clear expectation that teachers use assessment information to plan for pupils' next steps in their learning. You and senior leaders have supported teachers in their interpretation of assessment information and have helped them to understand how to use this information to see how well pupils are learning and to show pupils what they need to do to improve and to take the next steps.

You have improved expectations as to how teachers guide pupils to assess and improve their own work. In English, for example, pupils use 'WAGOLLS' ('What a good one looks like') to demonstrate a successful piece of writing which also identifies successes in their own work and what they need to do to improve further.

Senior leaders have prioritised the teaching of grammar and punctuation. You have introduced a new grammar programme and pupils now have a distinct weekly grammar lesson. You have also introduced a spelling strategy and pupils now have daily lessons in spelling or phonics. In your tracking of current Year 6 progress, you have demonstrated that this is helping pupils to develop their skills in grammar and spelling and the work that we saw in pupils' books also shows this. It is clear that pupils are expected to transfer their learning in English into other areas of the curriculum.

In 2016, pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics combined was above that of all pupils nationally. However, their progress from their starting points was lower than all pupils nationally. You shared with me information about the progress of disadvantaged pupils in mathematics, reading and writing. This indicates that the difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared to all other pupils nationally in the summer of 2016 tests was smaller than in previous years. However, too few disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, achieved the expected standard in mathematics.

Since the last inspection, you have developed a more cohesive strategy for monitoring the work of the school. There is now a more systematic approach, with each monitoring activity informing the next. For example, you now look at the information teachers provide about pupils' progress when you are evaluating pupils'

work in their books; you use this to establish the level of challenge that teachers are providing. You address any concerns with teachers, provide them with support through mentoring and coaching and then look again at pupils' books to check the impact that the increase in the levels of challenge and expectations has on pupils' progress.

Since the last inspection, an external review of governance has been undertaken. This identified clear areas of action which you and the board of governors had begun to address. However, there has been a change in personnel in the governing body and three of the more experienced governors are no longer in post. The governors with whom I met are passionate about the school and their desire to support improvement. However, you, the governing body themselves and the local authority have identified the need for further training in order to equip governors with the skills they require to fully understand the school's strengths and weaknesses, so that they can rigorously hold you and senior leaders to account. You and the local authority are working to recruit governors and are planning to provide further training to support governors in their role.

Since the last inspection, an external review of pupil premium has been undertaken. The actions identified are fit for purpose and the school is working well to tackle these. For example, it identified the progress of disadvantaged boys in English as an area of weakness and a working party has been established to address this. You have also appointed a new learning mentor, with whom you meet on a regular basis. Her work focuses exclusively on disadvantaged pupils, developing their confidence, self-esteem, aspirations and learning habits. You value her work in supporting these pupils to make progress.

External support

You have been proactive in seeking external support and developing relationships with external partners. For example, you have successfully secured funding to support the development of middle leadership, working with leaders from Hilton Primary School. The local authority has a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is providing support from one of its school improvement officers along with that from the headteacher of Chaucer Junior School. You say that this support has been helpful in developing strategic leadership within your school. The local authority understands the need for further training for the governing body and plans are in place to provide this.

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

Deborah Mosley
Her Majesty's Inspector