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Mr Michael Arthur
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Arthur

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Toner Avenue Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 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:

- sharpen the improvement plan by using more specific timeframes, identifying roles and responsibilities more clearly and making better use of measurable success criteria
- further develop the roles of subject leaders in improvement planning and checking for improvements
- ensure that disadvantaged pupils in all year groups make at least good progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the English and mathematics subject leaders and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken

since the last inspection. A telephone call with a representative of the local authority provided additional information. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We visited classrooms together, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work. A range of documents were scrutinised, including records relating to the monitoring of teaching and governing body minutes. I checked documentation and information linked to safeguarding.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been two changes to staffing. In September 2016 you took up post as headteacher and a teacher joined the school.

Main findings

You have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching. As a result, pupils' outcomes are improving. The refined marking and feedback policy is well understood by staff and pupils. There is growing evidence that this has a positive impact upon pupils' progress and addressing gaps in pupils' learning. You recognise that there is still further work to ensure that existing learning gaps are closed and that pupils are provided with work which challenges and deepens their learning.

Teachers' approaches to assessing and recording pupil's progress are developing. As a result, teachers are clearer where pupils' learning gaps exist and they check pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics carefully. This is helping them to plan more carefully to meet pupils' needs and interests. Generally, teachers plan the deployment of teaching assistants effectively. On occasion, where teaching assistants are not provided with sufficient guidance, the pupils that they are supporting make limited progress.

There is now in place a more structured approach to the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. At the same time, you are ensuring that this work does not stifle creativity in the teaching of writing. While this work is at an early stage of development, there are signs that it is engaging pupils effectively and providing them with a good grounding in the key skills to improve their writing. Appropriate plans are in place for further staff development. Both senior and middle leaders are involved in checking that this approach is improving pupils' progress.

Opportunities for pupils to improve their mathematical reasoning skills are increasing. As a result, pupils are beginning to apply their number skills and knowledge in problem-solving activities. For example, we noted Year 2 pupils making effective use of their understanding of fractions to solve problems set in a 'Children in Need' context. There is still further work to develop pupils' oral and written explanations of their methods and the reasoning behind their solutions.

The increased focus on pupils' progress across the school is beginning to pay dividends. In 2016, children's outcomes by the end of early years have been

maintained at similar levels to 2015. As a result, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is close to that found nationally. In 2016, the difference widened between the proportions of disadvantaged children in Reception who achieved a good level of development when compared to other children nationally. However, your analysis shows this was largely related to a higher proportion of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in that cohort.

By the end of key stage 1, overall proportions of pupils attaining the expected standards is above that found nationally in all subjects. However, there remain attainment differences between disadvantaged pupils when compared with other pupils nationally. This is because these pupils did not make strong enough progress to catch up from their starting points. By the end of key stage 2, pupils' progress, including for disadvantaged pupils, was significantly above that found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. This demonstrates a substantial improvement in pupils' outcomes by the end of Year 6.

Since your recent appointment you have quickly identified the strengths and areas for improvement across the school. You also have a secure knowledge of the community your school serves and you are working hard to develop the confidence of parents. You have a sharp focus upon improving pupils' outcomes. Along with other leaders and staff, you are developing approaches to ensure that pupils' learning can be assessed accurately. This is to ensure that teaching better meets pupils' needs and can be checked more regularly. The recently introduced pupil progress records are helping leaders to check on current pupils' progress and attainment. You are supporting the development of other leaders, which is improving their skills and increasing their confidence. At the same time, you have put more effective lines of accountability in place.

You have produced a plan to address the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. While the plan includes appropriate actions, it could be improved. This could be done by identifying more specific timeframes for some actions, by being clearer about who is responsible and accountable for completion of actions and monitoring of impact and by introducing measurable success criteria.

Middle leaders are starting to have a greater influence over school improvements. Following leadership training in a local good school, they have begun to check for improvements in teaching and learning. Middle leaders have also started to organise relevant training for staff, which is beginning to improve mathematics teaching and the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, there is still further work to do to ensure that these leaders are more fully involved in the analysis of pupil progress information, school development planning and checking for impact.

Governors have high aspirations for the school, the staff and pupils. They were resolute in their approach to the appointment of the headteacher to ensure that the best appointment was made. In the interim, they ensured that appropriate

leadership arrangements were in place. Governors maintain their focus on improving pupils' outcomes. They provide appropriate challenge and support for senior leaders. Strategic links between governors and middle leaders, particularly for mathematics and English, are less well developed.

Leaders and governors commissioned the recommended external review of the use of pupil premium promptly. The recent evaluation of the impact of this review shows that the planned actions are being implemented effectively. As a result, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving by the end of key stage 2. However, the review does not highlight sufficiently some of the remaining challenges in improving disadvantaged pupils' outcomes, particularly in early years and key stage 1. Furthermore, while the review evaluates that teachers plan consistently for effective deployment of teaching assistants, this is not supported by the evidence found during our joint visits to lessons.

External support

Governors ensured that appropriate interim leadership arrangements were in place until the appointment of the headteacher in September 2016.

Middle leaders have benefited from leadership development in a good school where there is a national leader for education (NLE). Support and challenge from the local authority school improvement adviser is beginning to support middle leaders to apply this training. However, their abilities to develop improvement plans and check the impact are not yet fully developed. Local authority consultants are providing appropriate support in early years, mathematics and English, which is bringing improvements to the quality of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector