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Marie Manton
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Dear Mrs Manton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodfield Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 April 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 April 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- teachers help pupils to make even faster progress in mathematics by planning activities that give pupils the chance to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills
- the head of school and other senior leaders ensure that staff follow school policies when planning activities for pupils of different abilities and when marking pupils' work
- all governors have the skills and expertise required to hold senior leaders rigorously to account.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the head of school, other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors, and a local authority representative, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher of Whitgreave Junior School to discuss the support that senior leaders from Whitgreave are providing to staff at Woodfield Junior. The school's action plans were evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the current information about pupils' achievement and senior leaders' feedback to teachers following lesson observations. The head of school and the deputy headteacher from Whitgreave Junior School joined me on visits to some classes in each year group. We spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at examples of pupils' work.

Context

Woodfield Junior School is federated with Woodfield Infant School. The governing body is responsible for both schools. An executive headteacher with responsibility for overseeing the work of the junior and infant schools left in August 2016 following a period of absence. The governing body did not replace this role. Prior to the last inspection, the local authority arranged for senior leaders from Whitgreave Junior to support staff at Woodfield. This support has continued. Since June 2016, staff have also been receiving support from St Bartholomew's Teaching School.

Main findings

In partnership with senior leaders from Whitgreave Junior School and St Bartholomew's Teaching School, you have taken appropriate steps to strengthen teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Teachers and teaching assistants at Woodfield have benefited from training provided by senior leaders from both schools and opportunities to observe highly effective practice.

Staff make sure that the activities they plan capture the interest of pupils. In lessons, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning. Pupils are keen to talk about what they are learning. They spoke positively about the changes that have taken place. 'I am learning so much more' and 'we have to think hard' were just some of the comments made by pupils when asked to describe their lessons.

The 2016 provisional results show that standards were below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics. They also show that most pupils did not make enough progress from their different starting points. These results reflect the impact of previous weaknesses in teaching and the impact of staffing absences. Current work in pupils' books shows that, while standards remain below those expected, they are rising and pupils are making faster progress than in the past.

Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are higher than before. With support from their colleagues at Whitgreave, senior leaders have checked that the school's information about the standards attained by pupils in reading, writing and mathematics is accurate. Senior leaders and staff have identified what pupils need to learn in order to reach the expected standard for their age and to work at greater depth. The system for tracking pupils' progress has improved. Leaders and staff closely monitor the progress of individual pupils and make sure that pupils who are at risk of falling behind receive appropriate support. Nonetheless, senior leaders have yet to make sure that all teaching is helping pupils to make consistently rapid progress.

Teachers are getting better at using information about pupils' achievement to plan activities that are matched to the range of abilities in their class. However, you recognise that the progress that pupils make remains variable. This is because a few staff do not consistently adhere to the school policy when planning work. For example, teachers are required to plan for, and provide the pupils who are ready with, more challenging work during lessons. However, there are still occasions when this does not happen. This especially affects the most able pupils and sometimes inhibits the progress they make.

During our brief visits to lessons, pupils were particularly keen to show us their 'writing challenge cards'. These cards are adapted for pupils of different abilities and include features such as direct speech, verbs, and personification. Pupils explained that these cards are helpful because they make clear what must be included in their writing. Pupils have regular opportunities to apply their writing skills and to practise using these features across a range of subjects. Pupils in Year 4, for instance, wrote factual reports about Chinese food as part of their 'Food Around the World' project. The pupils made sure that their reports were informative and that they used grammar and punctuation correctly.

Pupils have a secure understanding of how to use their knowledge of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to answer a range of mathematical questions. However, you have rightly identified that opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills are underdeveloped, particularly in Years 3 and 4.

The school's revised marking policy expects teachers to make sure that pupils know how to improve their work. Although staff are increasingly adhering to this policy, there are still instances when pupils do not know how to correct errors in their work. The presentation of pupils' work has improved. Pupils are taking much more pride in their work. They are getting better at making sure their letters and numbers are neatly and correctly formed.

Year-group leaders and subject leaders have a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities. With support from the school's local authority adviser and senior leaders from Whitgreave, they have started to check the work of staff and to

use information about the achievement of pupils to identify where improvements are required.

Governors recognise that not all members of the governing body are carrying out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Some governors provide an appropriate level of support and challenge. For example, they meet with staff and ask pertinent questions about the impact of leaders' actions on pupils' learning. In contrast, a few governors make a limited contribution. In light of this variability, governors have asked the local authority to carry out a review of their work. They intend to use this review to write a governing body action plan. They are also planning to organise relevant training so that all governors develop the skills required to hold leaders to account.

Following the last inspection, you and other leaders devised short-term action plans. These plans have been suitably focused on tackling the weaknesses identified at the time of that inspection. You are in the process of writing a whole-school improvement plan that incorporates the weaknesses identified during the section 5 inspection and findings from your own monitoring. In response to feedback from the local authority adviser, you are currently revising this plan so that it contains measurable success criteria. You also intend to make clear who will monitor and who will evaluate the impact of the actions on pupils' achievement and on teaching.

External support

The local authority adviser, together with the senior leaders from Whitgreave Junior school and St Bartholomew's Teaching School, have contributed to the improvements in teaching and pupils' learning. Their work is also helping senior staff to develop their leadership skills. The local authority is aware that further work is required to strengthen the work of the governing body.

Since September 2016 senior leaders from both Woodfield Junior and Woodfield Infant School have attended joint training events and they have worked together to update school policies. This collaboration is giving staff across both schools the opportunity to share and develop effective practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Usha Devi
Her Majesty's Inspector