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Mrs Julia Graham
Consett Infant School
Teasdale Street
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Dear Mrs Graham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Consett Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- provide staff training based upon their emerging needs identified from your more systematic self-evaluation and appraisal systems
- ensure that pupils, particularly the most able, are provided with opportunities to work at greater depth in reading and writing
- embed leadership developments so that subject leaders' impact and strategic challenge from governors continue to grow.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and the English subject leader to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings with four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority provided additional information. I evaluated the school improvement plan.

We visited classrooms together, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work. A range of documents was 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 changes to staffing and governance. There is an additional part-time teacher, two additional teaching assistants and one new governor. The restructured governor committee arrangements now include data and assessment, and teaching and learning committees.

Main findings

You have taken effective action to improve the quality of teaching. This has included staff visiting other schools to consider effective practice and the introduction of systems which clearly identify the expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. As a result, pupils' outcomes are improving. Teachers plan teaching which is better matched to pupils' needs, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able. This is because they are beginning to make effective use of the recently introduced approach to assessing and recording pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. There is still further work to ensure that more pupils are working at greater depth.

In 2016, at the end of Year 2, the proportions of pupils working at the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics were above those found nationally. The proportions of pupils working at greater depth in mathematics matched those found nationally. However, the proportions of pupils working at greater depth in reading and writing were below those found nationally. Your plans clearly identify actions to improve the proportions of pupils who are working at greater depth in these subjects. Your detailed pupil progress information is showing strong progress for current pupils in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and Reception. However, the improvement in pupils' progress is not yet as evident in Year 1. You have put in place additional support and training from the local authority to address this.

Additional support, provided by increased teacher and teaching assistant availability, is beginning to help accelerate the learning of pupils. You thoughtfully deploy the available teacher and teaching assistant support to diminish differences in achievement and help pupils stay on track to accomplish ambitious attainment targets. Improvements to appraisal systems for staff, which now include teaching assistants, is assisting in identifying training needs and improving lines of accountability. This is helping leaders check that staff deployment and training accomplishes its aim of accelerating pupils' learning.

You and your staff have taken steps to improve the quality of writing. Opportunities

to write independently are increasing. Pupils are enthusiastic to write in a range of styles, about topics which they are interested in and which are often set in meaningful contexts. However, the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation needs to improve. Sometimes the resources, for example in phonics lessons, do not support pupils' recording in a neat way. You are reviewing your approaches to teaching handwriting and some of the resources used by pupils. The proportion of pupils who are working at the expected standards in writing is above that found nationally. The challenge remains to increase the proportion of pupils, particularly the most able, who are working at greater depth.

Teachers are starting to provide more reasoning and problem-solving activities to deepen pupils' learning. This is still a work in progress, as teachers do not yet apply this consistently across school. The introduction of intervention groups for the most able pupils is starting to increase opportunities for these pupils to work at greater depth. The links between class teaching and the work in the groups is not strong enough to ensure progression of pupils' learning. As a result, sometimes the problem-solving activities provided for pupils are outside their range of mathematical experience.

Pupils' books show that there is developing consistency in teachers' use of your marking and feedback policy. Pupils are responding to marking using your agreed 'green pen' approach and this is starting to bring about improvements in their writing, such as the quality of their spellings. You agree that opportunities for pupils to redraft short sections to improve the quality of work, as identified in your policy, require further development.

In the Reception classes, the quality of adult interactions is improving. This is evident both when children are involved in adult-led activities and when they are selecting activities planned to develop their learning. During my visit, children listened with high levels of interest when learning in the outdoors and staff made effective use of questioning to develop children's learning. A group of children who had completed this work earlier in the day were motivated to record their ideas through pictures and developing writing skills. Developments in the early years practice are improving the proportions of children, including disadvantaged children, who are achieving a good level of development. As a result, increasing proportions of children are well prepared to start Year 1.

You have produced a plan, which includes appropriate actions, to address the areas for improvement in the previous inspection report. The plan has precise improvement targets, which are beginning to enable governors to challenge senior leaders. More specific timeframes for some actions would help to ensure that the plan maintains momentum for change. Similarly, clearly identified dates for when leaders, including subject leaders, will check the impact of actions would sharpen lines of accountability.

Middle leaders are developing their leadership skills. This is because you have

provided clear expectations for their roles and put in place relevant training, including support from the local authority. This has both better equipped them to lead improvements and motivated them for the task ahead. While they are beginning to take a more active role in school improvement, they are not yet fully involved with checking the impact of improvement actions. Their links with governors are developing, particularly in English, although the links between the mathematics leader and governors are not yet as well established.

You have ensured the prompt completion of the recommended external reviews for the school's use of pupil premium and governance. Appropriate action plans are in place and leaders and governors regularly review these. The recently introduced governor committees are providing an improved strategic focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' outcomes. Link governor roles are providing opportunities for governors to gain greater insight into school improvement. However, the development of this approach is variable across different subjects and areas of responsibility.

External support

Well-targeted local authority support to improve the quality of provision in early years, develop the quality of teaching and learning, and improve the skills of middle leaders has brought about evident improvements in all aspects. The planned support to develop the quality of teaching in Year 1 links well to the identified need to increase pupils' progress in this year group.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector