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Mrs Wendy Nelson
Headteacher
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The Greenway
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Dear Mrs Nelson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorntree Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 February 2017, 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 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:

- develop the role of subject leaders further
- increase pupils' attendance and punctuality
- sharpen school improvement planning to focus on specific outcomes for pupils at points during the academic year and to identify when and by whom actions will be carried out, checked and evaluated

- improve governors' ability to challenge leaders robustly about the school's performance information.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, pupils, parents and carers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. In addition, I spoke by telephone with the school's improvement partner from Middlesbrough Co-operative Learning Trust. I reviewed a range of documents, including the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, improvement planning, minutes of meetings of the governing body and staff training records. You and I visited a number of lessons to check on pupils' learning and progress.

Context

There have been a number of changes to the school's staffing since the section 5 inspection. Two teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. A part-time 'closing the gap' teacher, three newly qualified teachers and a key stage 1 teaching assistant took up post during the 2016 autumn term. The number of pupils on the school's roll has grown from 373 at the time of the section 5 inspection to 386 currently.

Main findings

Leaders are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching in the school. They are supporting the further development of teachers' skills well, especially in lower key stage 2.

The subject leader for mathematics has developed the curriculum successfully to ensure that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their basic mathematical skills in reasoning to solve tricky problems. Further work is required to make sure all subject leaders have the necessary skills to identify and address areas for further improvement in the subjects that they lead.

Teachers are deploying teaching assistants more effectively to make sure they have a direct impact on pupils' progress. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants are well aware of the progress made by individual pupils who attend intervention groups.

All staff understand that every second counts for these pupils, some of whom need to catch up to their peers much more rapidly and many of whom need to attend school more often and arrive on time.

Leaders have taken assertive action to reduce the number of behaviour incidents,

including racist name-calling, in school. All staff act in accordance with the new policy. They challenge and address any instances of unacceptable behaviour. Pupils feel safe and are happy to report that there are fewer instances of poor behaviour in school.

The school improvement plan addresses the issues identified at the time of the previous inspection. However, there is insufficient clarity about when and who will carry out, check and evaluate the impact of improvement activities. In addition, governors find it difficult to evaluate the rate of the school's improvement because the improvement plan does not include sufficient targets, especially in relation to the progress made by pupils.

Governors have identified a gap in their own skills. They are actively looking to recruit an additional governor with a thorough knowledge of school performance information who will challenge leaders robustly if progress is not rapid enough.

External support

The local authority holds school leaders to account formally, on a half-termly basis, for the progress being made by pupils. In addition, the local authority is supporting the school to improve pupils' behaviour further. For example, the local authority is financing one-to-one support for a number of pupils with behavioural difficulties.

The relatively new and inexperienced leadership team, following a successful bid of £12,500 to the National College for Teaching and Leadership, is supported well by leaders from Pallister Park Primary School.

The school's improvement partner from Middlesbrough Co-operative Learning Trust has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. He challenges and supports school leaders effectively. This increases their capacity to improve the school further.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector