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Miss Jacqueline Burns
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Dear Miss Burns

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Roebuck School

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At the section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 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 most recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- further raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly in writing, so that they provide pupils with the level of challenge needed to make the best possible progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior leaders, the chair and four other members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with a group of

pupils. You accompanied me on a learning walk, we jointly observed the teaching of phonics in key stage 1 and I looked at work in pupils' books. We also visited the school's Nursery, which is situated away from the main school site. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other key documentation, including the school's current self-evaluation.

Context

There have been a number of staffing changes since the school's most recent inspection, including the appointment of two new members of the school's senior leadership team. These changes have brought greater stability to the school, both in terms of teaching and of leadership. Pupil mobility at the school is rising and is now noticeably higher than in most schools nationally. The proportion of children joining the school in the early years who are at an early stage of learning English is also increasing. At the time of my visit, the school was experiencing some disruption caused by rewiring work, which has meant that some classes have been temporarily housed in the school library.

Main findings

Following the most recent inspection, you set about developing an effective leadership team that would have the capacity to bring about the improvements that the school required. You have clearly been successful in doing this, and both senior leaders and the wider school community share your ambitions for the school. Work has also been undertaken to ensure that subject leaders have the skills and knowledge to play an effective role in improving outcomes in their areas. Leadership at all levels is now more secure and able to effect change.

You, other senior leaders and governors all have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In your improvement planning, you have correctly identified a number of priorities for the school that will move it forward. Governors are now much more involved in the life of the school and are providing you with an appropriate balance of challenge and support, to ensure that improvement priorities are tackled successfully. The actions you are taking are having a clear, positive impact on the quality of education that the school provides. As a result, the school is now on the road to recovery.

One important action that you have taken is to improve the school's systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress. This is having a positive impact on teaching and learning. The tracking ensures that teachers have the information they need to plan learning in line with pupils' different needs, and also allows leaders to put extra support in place where pupils may be falling behind. The data also allows leaders to keep a better check on where progress is quickest and where more support may be required.

Your tracking data shows that standards across school are improving, but that

improvements are currently stronger in key stage 2 than in key stage 1. This view is supported by the evidence seen in books, which showed that there is room for teachers to further increase the amount of challenge for pupils at all levels in order to speed up rates of progress. One area where outcomes are rapidly improving in key stage 1 is in phonics. Here, teachers and teaching assistants have benefited from focused training and are delivering effective, systematic teaching of phonics that is having a positive impact on pupils' skills and confidence.

The school is also working hard to build on these improvements in phonics so that pupils become more assured readers. Leaders have introduced a range of approaches, including using class novels by authors such as David Walliams, to engage pupils and develop their comprehension skills. The school's daily reading programme, delivered by well-trained teaching assistants, is also having a positive effect.

There are also improvements in the quality of pupils' writing, and teachers are ensuring that pupils are given plenty of opportunities to write for different purposes and across different subjects. There is still more to be done in this area though, as leaders acknowledge. Currently, not all teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve in their written work. You have begun to address this issue, and both school leaders and the local authority were keen to talk about ongoing work aimed at 'removing the ceiling' from teachers' expectations.

The previous inspection identified the outdoor provision for children in the Nursery as needing to be improved. This has been done very successfully, and Nursery children now have access to a well-planned and well-resourced outdoor area that caters effectively for their learning needs.

The atmosphere at the Roebuck is one of happy and purposeful endeavour. Pupils have very positive views of the school and say that they feel safe and looked after well. The school is calm because behaviour is consistently well managed by all staff. Breaktimes are well supervised and pupils enjoy using the various items of playground equipment available to them. However, attendance rates remain stubbornly low despite the school's best efforts to reduce absences and promote good attendance. It is important that the school redoubles its efforts in this area and continues to work hard with parents and pupils to ensure that they understand the importance of good attendance.

External support

Since the inspection in February 2016, the school has received effective support from the local authority. The 'team around the school' approach that the local authority has adopted has meant that the school has benefited from working closely with two other schools, as well as receiving support from local authority advisers. These advisers know the school well and have every confidence that school leaders, including governors, have the capacity to move the school forward at a good pace.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon

Her Majesty's Inspector