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Jillian Davis
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Davis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Walpole Highway Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 September 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 September 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school improvement plan's success criteria are measurable wherever possible
- ensure that teaching in the mixed-age classes consistently meets the needs of all pupils so that time in lessons is maximised to the full
- ensure that improvements in the quality of teaching over time are evidenced through improvements in pupils' outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher, seven pupils from Years 5 and 6, the chair and one other member of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. We visited every class together to observe pupils' learning and to look at the work in their books. I scrutinised the school's records of recruitment checks of staff, and sampled a number of personnel files. I looked at the school's website to check compliance against what the school is expected to publish.

Context

Since the previous inspection, pupils are now taught in three mixed-aged classes for the whole day comprising Reception Year and Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6. At the time of the previous inspection the formation of the classes was adjusted for the afternoon sessions. You have also tendered your resignation as executive headteacher with effect from 31 August 2017. A replacement and experienced executive headteacher has already been appointed.

Main findings

The school improvement plan correctly identifies the key priorities to enable the school to become an effective provider within a challenging timescale. It is clear who leads each improvement initiative and who checks the actions taken in order to measure for success. You have routinely evaluated the actions for impact, but the plan would benefit from sharpening some of the success criteria so that those measuring for impact are able to do so more forensically.

You continue to support pupils in the school very well. Many of these pupils are vulnerable, coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or having had low aspirations. Your pastoral support systems, primarily provided through your family support unit, ensure that these pupils attend school regularly, enjoy the experience and receive well-targeted one-to-one support. Hence, the pupils with whom I met spoke positively about school, and many aspire to study later on at university.

You are aware that because of the small number of pupils in each year group, this has made assessing pupils' progress accurately more challenging. In order to overcome this challenge, you have involved teachers from the three other schools in your federation to share samples of pupils' work and to moderate and validate teachers' assessments. The most recent assessments have also been moderated and validated externally by the local authority and your education challenge partner.

I have also been provided with evidence to demonstrate that you have given more pupils the opportunity to develop their writing, particularly in key stage 1, covering a range of styles and genres. This has been delivered across a wider range of

subject areas including science and topic work. Your science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) project work has resulted in pupils carrying out exciting experiments and writing up their findings in a more detailed way. I observed pupils in the afternoon conducting an experiment in which mixed-age groups designed a vertical structure to transport marbles from the top to the bottom. They approached this with great enthusiasm and were challenged by their teachers to explain why some structures were more successful in achieving the goal than others.

Equally, the same STEM project has provided a higher degree of challenge for your most able pupils. You have increased teachers' awareness of who the most able pupils are in their lessons with a view to them planning more strategically for their learning needs. During my visits to lessons, I saw the most able pupils attempting tasks which required them to use their reasoning skills and hence deepen their knowledge and understanding. There are still occasions when teaching does not meet the needs of some of the most able pupils, and they could be allowed to embark on complex tasks more quickly, so that their learning time is maximised in the lesson. You have also planned for all the most able pupils to come together as a group from all four schools in the federation through your 'Competition and Challenge' programme. This enables them to compete against peers of a similar ability and motivates them to want to achieve highly. Your participation in the 'GR8 in 8' project, which focuses on developing pupils' reasoning skills in mathematics over a two-month period, has also had a positive impact. This is demonstrated by pupils' ability to explain their reasoning when solving mathematical problems and to reason more logically than before.

You have also worked well to improve the quality of the teaching of phonics by successfully bidding for £5,000 to enable a targeted teacher to develop the teaching of phonics in key stage 1, and to observe good practice in other schools. This has led to this member of staff considering alternative approaches to teaching phonics, and selecting methods which secure the best outcomes.

You have ensured that middle leadership strengthens through enabling your senior teachers to attend a 'dynamic leadership' course. They now play a greater role in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the work of the school, and have been trained to observe and evaluate the quality of teaching in their relative subject areas.

Teachers have developed a better understanding of the needs of different groups of pupils in their classes and plan better to meet their needs. Improvements in teaching, however, take time to demonstrate impact on pupils' outcomes. Your current data on pupils' progress shows that differences between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are steadily diminishing, but that more work is needed in this area. Your tracking information, based on your regular assessments of pupils' progress, also suggests that a greater proportion of pupils will achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and in mathematics in 2017. You have ensured greater accountability from teachers through your performance

management system which requires teachers to identify an achievement-related target and which also requires them to identify individual pupils. Senior leaders gather information about the school's performance more regularly through a range of monitoring activities including pupil progress meetings, learning walks, observations of learning and progress, work scrutinies and through the involvement of external agencies to validate their work.

The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and the challenges it faces. Governors have ensured that the school has focused on strong leadership and on improving outcomes for all pupils. Between them, the governors have a good range of useful skills to enable them to fulfil their role effectively. Governors were adamant that your replacement must be an experienced headteacher who understands the challenges of your school within the context of the wider federation.

External support

The local authority has supported individual teachers well to improve their practice and has brokered links with other schools to share their good practice with Walpole Highway Primary School. They have also brokered the education challenge partner who conducts external reviews in order to validate the school's own judgements of its effectiveness.

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

Yours sincerely

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector