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Mr Steven Hall
Whitehill Primary School
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Dear Mr Hall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whitehill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 April 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection which took place in February 2014 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 quality of teaching across the school is consistently good and that all groups of pupils are always challenged to do their very best
- make even better use of the learning environment to celebrate pupils' achievements and promote their love of reading
- ensure that feedback to teachers after formal lesson observations focuses more sharply and succinctly on the progress that different groups of pupils are making
- continue to develop the role of the middle leaders of non-core subjects, such as history and geography, so that they have a greater impact on teaching, learning

and assessment

- ensure that the website is checked on a regular basis so that it is compliant with the information that must be published.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings and discussions with you, middle leaders, governors, pupils and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's development plan was evaluated, alongside other documentation that you provided. Together we looked at a sample of pupils' work and undertook a learning walk to observe teaching and learning in key stages 1 and 2.

Context

Since the last inspection a new teacher has been appointed to teach in key stage 2.

Main findings

The school has been through a turbulent period over the last few years. A significant number of staff left and you took up your appointment as headteacher just before the last inspection in 2016. You and your local authority representative believe that the staff team has now stabilised. The school is also currently dealing with a legacy of underachievement, poor teaching and potentially inaccurate assessments. Furthermore, the current published data must be treated with caution due to significant cohort issues, such as high mobility. Since your appointment the number of pupils on roll has risen, which is a clear testament to the improvements that you are making.

Immediately after the last inspection you put together an action plan to address the areas for improvement highlighted by the inspection team. The development plan identifies a good range of practical strategies to improve practice and outcomes for pupils across the school. There are clear lines of accountability and actions are regularly monitored and often achieved.

Alongside you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders now take an active part in the monitoring of the quality of teaching across the school. This is done in a variety of ways, such as lesson observations, work scrutiny and planning reviews. However, we both agree that the feedback given to teachers after lesson observations does not give enough detail about the progress that different groups of pupils are making.

School records show that the quality of teaching is improving quickly. However, during our learning walk and from looking at a sample of pupils' work we both agree that, although teaching is improving, more work needs to be done to ensure

that it is good or better in all year groups and that pupils of all abilities are challenged to do their very best.

Working with other schools, moderation of standards with regard to English and mathematics is now a central part of the school's work. This ensures that teachers now have a better understanding of year group objectives and expectations. Consequently, they are becoming more confident at planning activities which meet the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly the most able.

As a result of training, teachers are now asking questions which probe and deepen pupils' understanding. During our learning walk we observed effective questioning being used by some teachers in English and mathematics lessons. Pupils also told me that the questions that teachers now ask encourage them to think hard.

Boys are of the opinion that learning is now much more active and fun. New resources have been purchased which appeal to boys' interests. Teachers take more care to plan activities which will attract and sustain boys' interests. Outdoor learning activities are currently being cascaded across the school. This will further enhance the engagement of boys. The school's assessment information shows that the gap in attainment between girls and boys is now closing in most year groups.

Behaviour around the school has improved considerably. You have implemented a new approach to behaviour management which is consistent across the school. Pupils commented that their peers 'listen a lot more and don't shout out'. Our learning walk confirmed that this is the case. Most teachers now make their expectations of behaviour clear. During my visit, I also observed good standards of behaviour, both in the dining hall and in the playground.

Leaders of English and mathematics know their subjects well. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility and monitor the progress of pupils as they move through the school. A concerted effort has been made to improve outcomes in reading and mathematics, particularly at key stage 2. The impact of the school's actions is beginning to bear fruit. Some pupils told me that mathematical activities are becoming more difficult. Others find the new reading books that the school has purchased more interesting and challenging. However, we are both in full agreement that better use could be made of the environment to further develop pupils' reading skills and celebrate other aspects of their work. You also quite rightly pointed out that the role of leaders of other subjects is not as well developed as it is in English and mathematics.

Attendance is improving. Pupils understand that to 'get a good education' and 'a better job in the future' they need to attend school on a regular basis. The number of parents taking their children out of school during term time has decreased. You ensure that parents are made aware of the possible impact of poor attendance on children's progress and attainment. The learning mentor offers good levels of support to those families which are more reluctant to send their children to school.

Good attendance is celebrated at assemblies and in raffles with prizes such as trips to the cinema, play centre or bowling alley.

The governing body is strong and you have their full support. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and the challenges that lie ahead. When necessary, they are not afraid to take difficult decisions if it is in the best interests of the school. Governors act as a critical friend, offering you support and challenge in equal measure.

The school website provides parents with a good range of valuable information. However, it is not compliant with regard to the information that must be published. There is insufficient detail about the curriculum. The dates that governors were appointed, their terms of office and attendance records at governors' meetings have been omitted. In addition, the special educational needs report is not dated, so it is unclear if it is reviewed annually. Furthermore, the report does not evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

During my visit everyone that I spoke to was complimentary about the improvements and changes that you have made since your appointment. You show a strong and steely determination to drive the school onwards and upwards. My discussions with pupils clearly showed that they notice the difference you are making. They appreciate the booster classes that the school now provides to develop their mathematical skills. They also commented that assemblies are now 'interesting and fun' and that you visit classrooms to observe learning on a regular basis.

External support

The local authority hold you in high regard and support the school well. They have helped you to improve the quality of teaching across the school and develop middle leadership roles. Plans are afoot to help you develop the role of the special educational needs coordinator. Advice, guidance and support have also been offered in relation to staffing issues and governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Sheila Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector