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Dear Mrs Turner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thrapston Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 May 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.

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:

- all staff have a full understanding of the expectations of the curriculum in reading and writing at the end of key stages 1 and 2
- staff in the Reception classes encourage parents to share with them the particular milestones that their child has achieved at home.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors, and a representative of the local authority. I also spoke with parents at the start of the school day and a group of pupils. I evaluated school improvement plans and I scrutinised pupils' mathematics books from all year groups, as well as assessment information provided by the school, minutes from meetings of the governing body and documents relating to safeguarding.

Context

Following the previous inspection, two new governors have joined the governing body, a new position of key stage 1 leader has been created and the subject leader for English commenced her role in the summer term. The early years leader is currently on long-term absence.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have acted swiftly and purposefully to tackle the areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection. The school's improvement plans contain appropriate, specific actions with relevant milestones and opportunities to check that the school is moving forward. Consequently, governors are in no doubt what is to be done, when and by whom. The governing body is monitoring the work of the school rigorously and holding senior leaders to account for their actions. Governors are making timetabled visits and there is a robust system for them to report their findings to the remainder of the governing body. Recent governors' visits to the school included an analysis of pupils' progress and a safeguarding audit to ensure that the appropriate checks have been made on staff and volunteers who work with pupils. Senior leaders make presentations to the governing body, enabling governors to ask questions and ensure, for example, that the pupil premium funding is being allocated and monitored appropriately. Governors understand the importance of attending relevant training so they can discharge their duties effectively.

Leaders have introduced a new assessment and tracking system. As a result, teachers assess pupils frequently and discuss their pupils' progress termly with a senior leader. Any pupils who are falling behind are quickly identified and given the help they need in order to catch up. Leaders have ensured that teachers are checking the accuracy of their assessments of pupils' work with staff in other schools in the cluster. Consequently, the assessments teachers are making are accurate. Staff have a good understanding of the expectations in mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2. This is not the case in reading and writing, where curriculum documentation has not yet been completed.

Leaders promptly organised an external review of the school's use of pupil premium

funding following the last inspection. The inclusion leader has acted upon its recommendations and now has a clear picture of how the funding is allocated and monitored to see whether it is being used effectively. She takes part in lesson observations and meetings about pupils' progress, keeping a careful eye on the progress disadvantaged pupils are making. Leaders are aware that comparisons should be made with other pupils nationally when examining how much progress disadvantaged pupils have made.

Subject leaders in English and mathematics have undertaken lesson observations and obtained pupils' views to establish that the curriculum meets their needs. As a result, pupils identify their own activities from a list and told me they enjoy this level of challenge. One said, 'If it's too easy, I just try the harder level.' Regular 'Wow!' activities, such as the Reception and Year 1 visit to Hamerton Zoo and the Year 3 visit to Flag Fens, help to make the curriculum more interesting and stimulating.

Teachers have undertaken training in the teaching of mathematics and effective questioning in the early years. Senior leaders and a representative of the local authority have ensured that this training has been used effectively by talking with pupils, looking at their books and visiting classrooms.

Teachers have designed '20-day-challenge tasks' that accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The tasks are designed to accelerate their progress by identifying small targets, for example correct spellings and multiplication tables that need to be learned in the 20 days.

The mathematics leader has ensured that pupils throughout the school are deepening their knowledge and skills by providing teachers with many examples of problem-solving and reasoning activities. Work in pupils' books shows that these activities are helping pupils with such topics as time, capacity and the four rules of number.

The deputy headteacher has ensured that pupils in key stage 1 are reading regularly. She does this by frequently hearing pupils read and checking the use of their reading cards and diaries, which are used to record when pupils are reading to an adult at home or at school. Those pupils who do not read regularly are identified and given the opportunity to read more frequently to staff and reading volunteers. The volunteers are given cue cards to enable them to ask questions of the pupils about the text and punctuation and therefore develop pupils' reading skills.

Leaders have ensured that there is a comprehensive assessment and tracking system in the Reception Year. The lead teacher is using this information to plan carefully for the next steps in children's learning. Staff check the accuracy of these assessments with other schools in the cluster to ensure that they are accurate.

Transition has also improved between Nursery and Reception classes. For example,

home visits start earlier and there have been an increased number of parental meetings.

Parents are not as fully involved with their child's progress as they could be. Staff in the early years do not do enough to encourage parents to inform staff when the child has successfully achieved a specific milestone at home.

External support

The local authority has provided good support to the school. The three reviews conducted since the last inspection have been thorough and useful in their assessment of the school's current progress and further areas for development. Training provided by the local authority in the Reception Year and in mathematics has been well received by staff and is having a positive impact on pupils throughout the school.

The external review of the pupil premium funding was detailed and provided the inclusion leader with a number of useful steps that have ensured that the allocation and monitoring of this funding for disadvantaged pupils are robust and rigorous.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier
Her Majesty's Inspector