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Mr Trevor Marsden
Sherard Primary School and Community Centre
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Dear Mr Marsden

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sherard Primary School and Community Centre

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 November 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and four members of the governing body. I spoke on the telephone to a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and considered the report from an external review of the use of pupil premium funding. I evaluated the school's arrangements for safeguarding. We visited lessons in Years 1 to 5. We also observed learning in the early years foundation stage. We looked at a range of pupils' work in lessons and in a separate work scrutiny.

Main findings

You and the governing body have an accurate view of the school's current effectiveness. You have taken swift and effective action to improve the areas for development identified at the last inspection. Your drive and determination to improve the school are clear. All leaders share your ambition to support pupils to make the progress of which they are capable.

Your development plans for the school are sharply focused on what the school needs to do to improve. You have shared your plans with the governing body. The governors whom I spoke with said the plans helped to set the agenda for their monitoring visits, so that they had a clear focus linked to school improvement. Leaders also spoke of how the school development plan enables them to lead effectively, giving clear and precise information to help them to do their job. Furthermore, leaders formulate their own action plans, taking key information from the school development plan, to ensure that they are working effectively and bringing about rapid improvements.

Improvement planning is linked to robust tracking of pupils' progress. This has been made possible because of the effective assessment system you have introduced. Teachers regularly update pupils' assessment information on the assessment database. You and other leaders monitor and analyse this information weekly. You carefully track all pupils, especially pupils who are disadvantaged, the most able pupils and the least able pupils. The leadership team discusses pupils' achievements with teachers, informally and formally in meetings about pupils' progress. Pupils who are not meeting their targets are supported to ensure that they 'get back on track'. Teachers are clear about their professional responsibilities to ensure that all pupils do well and, in turn, senior leaders provide effective support and guidance.

You were aware of the need to evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding more sharply. You commissioned an external review of the school's use of pupil premium funding, as requested by Ofsted. You have acted on recommendations made in the report. The governing body monitors the use of this funding and therefore governors have a good understanding of the impact it is having on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.

Teachers plan lessons that provide challenge for pupils. Staff have received training on 'What is challenge?' Our visits to classrooms and work in pupils' books show that teachers are developing higher expectations of pupils' progress. As you and other leaders have recognised, the many actions you are taking need time to become fully effective.

You have secured improvements in the leadership of the pre-school by ensuring that pre-school and Reception staff work closely together. Your early years leader has responsibility for the whole of the early years foundation stage and closely monitors the achievement of the children. The early years leader has delivered a comprehensive training programme to all early years staff to ensure that they have a good understanding of the early years curriculum. As a result, staff have higher expectations of what children can achieve and teachers' assessment information is accurate.

You acted quickly to improve the outdoor provision for the pre-school. The learning environment is stimulating and provides interest for the children. They have greater opportunities to extend their learning experiences, especially in mathematics. Senior leaders have a clear rationale behind the development of this area. Consequently, it meets the needs of the children and is a valuable resource that is helping to raise standards in the pre-school.

The environment in the preschool and Reception areas is rich in mathematical activities for children to explore and enjoy. For example, I saw children engaged in purposeful play in the mud kitchen, developing their mathematical language and their understanding of measures. Each day, children receive a teaching session with a mathematics focus. As well as the daily sessions, staff deliver an additional three mathematics sessions across the week. I observed a session during my visit and I saw evidence of children making sensible predictions and exploring units of measure. Teachers and teaching assistants provide timely intervention and support that help children make gains in their learning.

External support

The external support that the school has received has contributed to the rapid development of provision in the early years and to the school's accuracy of assessment.

The school has received support from the local authority to develop the early years foundation stage. Leaders, including governors, found this support helpful and recognise that it has contributed to tackling the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection successfully.

The school is also working with the Mowbray Education Trust. Staff from Sherard Primary School work collaboratively with other teachers in the trust to share their assessments of pupils' achievements. The professional discussions around what pupils can do provide useful staff development. Consequently, teachers' confidence and skills in assessment have improved.

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

Yours sincerely

Helen Richardson
Her Majesty's Inspector