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Dear Ms Taylor-Potts

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Walton Priory Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2015. 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:

- make sure that pupils make good progress in mathematics by having work that challenges them, deepens their understanding and improves their ability to reason and problem-solve
- make sure that the school's actions are rigorously evaluated so that subsequent actions are clearly focused on what needs to be done next to improve pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance further
- make sure that senior leaders use the array of information in the school to inform self-evaluation and to set suitable milestones against which leaders and

governors can measure pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, pupils and a consultant providing support to the governing body. I had a telephone discussion with a representative of the team who provides guidance and support to staff and leaders. Discussions focused on the actions taken by leaders since the last inspection and their impact on pupils' achievements. I evaluated the school's self-evaluation form, improvement plans and a range of other documents. With you, I observed pupils' learning in short visits to lessons across the school. I scrutinised and evaluated the work in pupils' books.

Context

Since the recent full inspection and the first monitoring inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership and staff team and to the governing body. The chair of the governing body was appointed recently.

Main findings

You have successfully addressed many of the long-standing issues faced by the school. You have identified underperforming staff and leaders and provided suitable challenge, help and support. You have restructured the leadership team and the recent appointments are contributing to improving the school successfully. The quality of learning, teaching and assessment has improved and pupils across the school are making better progress from their starting points in a range of subjects. You have provided training and support for staff in order to improve the school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Information provided by the school shows that the majority of staff now plan and deliver lessons that meet this group of pupils' needs and that these pupils are making similar progress to other pupils. The improved quality of learning, teaching and assessment is also impacting positively on the progress of pupils who are disadvantaged. As a result, pupils' work shows that the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school are diminishing. However, you realise that there is still much to do to make sure that staff sustain these improvements over time.

Where teaching is effective, teachers are using what they know about pupils' abilities, aptitudes and needs to plan learning activities that enable pupils to make good progress. The recently appointed head of English has implemented suitable approaches to improve pupils' reading and comprehension and writing and communication skills. Information provided by the school and pupils' work show that pupils currently in the school are doing better in these areas as a result of these changes.

You recognise that teaching that has lacked consistency and challenge over time has hindered pupils' learning in mathematics. Pupils' progress in mathematics is slower than progress seen in other subjects and a minority of pupils are unable to reason mathematically or to solve increasingly difficult problems confidently. You are addressing these issues with some success. Staff have participated in suitable training for the teaching of mathematics and you have invested in a range of teaching resources and materials. The work in pupils' books shows that these actions result in pupils' progress speeding up.

The school's self-evaluation and subsequent action plans focus on the areas for improvement identified at the inspection in November 2015 and the further actions identified at the monitoring inspection visit in June 2016. However, the self-evaluation form is overly descriptive and does not precisely evaluate the impact of the actions taken by leaders on pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance. In addition, senior leaders do not use the abundant information in the school to inform self-evaluation effectively or to set suitable milestones against which you and governors can measure the school's progress. Middle leaders are developing the skills required to hold staff to account within their area of responsibility. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress are improving across the school.

You have made sure that the actions to address the areas for improvement and the further actions have not hindered other areas for improvement. For example, you have worked with pupils, parents and staff to develop the proposed curriculum for next year that focuses on developing pupils' science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills. Pupils who spoke with me said that they are excited by the opportunities to work with construction companies and other employers to develop their problem-solving and design skills. In addition, pupils told me that changes and improvements to the school environment have helped to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour, as there are fewer interruptions and the classes are quieter. You have restructured the way pupils in key stage 2 are taught so that it is similar to that seen in most primary schools. One class teacher and teaching assistant teach one class for most of the time. Information provided by the school shows that this approach has resulted in pupils making better progress over time from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel that their learning has improved as a result of having fewer teachers.

An external review of governance and of the school's use of the pupil premium has been completed. Governors have acted upon the recommendations from the review swiftly. As a result, governors' roles and responsibilities are much clearer and the chair of the governing body has delegated link governor duties appropriately. The chair of the governing body has brought a much-needed sense of urgency to school improvement and makes sure that governors challenge you and your staff to address weaknesses and underperformance quickly and effectively. Improvements across the school in pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance and in the quality of teaching demonstrate the positive impact of these actions.

External support

The Hempstalls Teaching School Alliance provides effective support for you, teachers and leaders. There has been a clear emphasis on making sure that leaders focus on improving pupils' outcomes. Teachers are improving their knowledge and expertise through participation in 'getting to good' and 'outstanding teacher' programmes organised and delivered by Hempstalls. Leaders are now prioritising actions that make the biggest difference to raising standards, not ineffective initiatives that may distract them. A national leader of governance provides suitable and effective support for governors. Improvements throughout the school demonstrate the positive effect of this support.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Humphries
Her Majesty's Inspector