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Mrs Judy Cowgill
Headteacher
Hawthorn Primary School
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Tyne and Wear
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Dear Mrs Cowgill

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hawthorn Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 June 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 October 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- finalise senior leadership arrangements from September 2017 until a new headteacher takes up post
- ensure that precise and measurable targets to improve the progress of groups of pupils are set in the school improvement plan, so that governors can hold leaders to account more efficiently.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior and middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and another governor, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated alongside leaders' summary evaluation of the performance of the school. You and I conducted visits to a number of classrooms and learning spaces and looked at the work in pupils' books to check on learning and progress. I also met with a group of pupils and a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. A range of other documentation was reviewed, including records of the checks on teachers' performance, minutes of governing body meetings, information on the school's website and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the deputy headteacher has taken leave of absence and an acting deputy headteacher has been appointed from within the school. Two teachers have been promoted to fulfil the role of special educational needs coordinator during the deputy headteacher's absence. Two governors have left the governing body and one new governor has been appointed. The headteacher has announced that she will be retiring from her post in August 2017.

Main findings

You have worked tirelessly, with the full support of your staff team, since the previous inspection to improve the quality of teaching in the school. Pupils' workbooks show that progress is improving in all year groups, including for the most able pupils, and that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils must achieve. You are clear where some minor inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain and you are providing coaching and support for staff to help them to improve.

You have sought external expertise to help you to overhaul the school's system of assessment of English. Teachers now have a clear framework against which they can assess pupils' skills and knowledge. Teaching assistants have been included fully in this work and play an important role in identifying what pupils can do and what they need to improve. You have ensured the accuracy of teachers' assessments through extensive moderation within the school and across the trust. Teachers have further benefited from materials introduced by leaders to exemplify the higher standards expected in the national curriculum for writing. As a result, teaching is beginning to secure more pupils working at and towards greater depth in writing.

Teachers have enjoyed high-quality training and coaching in English and mathematics. This, combined with their improved understanding of pupils' prior

attainment, is enabling teachers to better plan work to meet pupils' needs. In mathematics, pupils are now challenged regularly through demanding problem-solving tasks and are routinely expected to explain their mathematical reasoning. You recognise that you can build on this by developing pupils' ability to work systematically when tackling problems.

Teaching has improved in the Reception class. Comprehensive training and coaching for staff has led to better provision for children with a clear focus on the basic skills of reading, writing and number in all areas of learning. During this inspection, children were highly engaged in their learning, sustaining their concentration on tasks and cooperating well with each other. Adults are deployed efficiently and support learning through small, focused teaching groups. Records of learning show that children's progress has accelerated considerably in writing, with children writing frequently and independently. Provision for mathematics has also improved, but you recognise that the rate of progress, for some of the most able and for some disadvantaged children, could be even faster.

Since the previous inspection, the whole school has risen to the challenge of developing a love of reading. Leaders conducted a reading audit and, consequently, introduced a much broader range of texts into the school to widen pupils' reading experiences. Training for teachers has given them the confidence to use more challenging books with pupils. As well as developing pupils' reading skills, this work is encouraging pupils to expand their vocabulary and this is evident in their writing. Every opportunity to develop reading is exploited, both across the curriculum and beyond the school day, with a well-attended reading club and regular trips to the library. Pupils value the reading challenges they are given by staff and enjoy the chances to make recommendations to each other about the books they should choose to read.

Leaders demand that staff are more accountable for the progress their pupils make. Teachers now analyse the performance information of pupils in their class and attend regular progress meetings to review the impact of their work. These meetings include subject leaders for English and mathematics, as well as the coordinator for special educational needs, so that immediate support can be discussed and agreed for any pupils identified as not achieving as well as they should. You have reviewed the system for managing the performance of teachers and now set measurable and demanding targets to improve the attainment of different groups of pupils. You and the chair of the governing body recognise that, while your school improvement plan is focused on the correct priorities, it lacks precise targets to improve the achievement of groups of pupils. This limits the ability of governors to hold leaders to account when they conduct their regular reviews of the plan.

You and your leadership team acknowledge that you have more work to do to ensure that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. Staff have received training so that they can plan more activities which allow

pupils to work independently, rather than over-relying on adult support, during lessons. Teaching assistants have developed their skills to meet the speech and language needs of some of the youngest children. You agreed, however, that when checking on the quality of teaching, leaders need to focus more on the progress being made by those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that teachers receive clear feedback on how to improve their teaching for this key group of pupils.

Middle leaders and the acting deputy headteacher have benefited from support, from the school's local authority achievement partner and other external consultants, to help them to make accurate and consistent judgements about the quality of teaching in the school. They know the school well and know what needs to be improved. They are a capable team with a strong vision and a track record of securing improvement. However, the governing body recognises that it will be essential to have interim senior leadership arrangements in place from September 2017, until a new headteacher takes up post, to ensure that the rate of improvement in the school is sustained.

You acted with urgency to commission the recommended reviews of governance and pupil premium spending. Since the review, governors have conducted an audit of their skills and received training to help them understand their roles and responsibilities. They are now better placed to challenge school leaders and minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate that they are now doing this with greater confidence. They have increased the time they spend in school and have a clear and accurate view of what is working well and what needs to improve. The review of pupil premium spending has assured you that resources are targeted at the correct priorities. You and your governing body know that there is more to do to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve consistently well across the school, including making accelerated progress across the early years to catch up quickly where they have low starting points.

External support

You have been proactive in seeking and brokering a range of external support to help you to improve the school. This has included the services of consultants to improve teaching in English and mathematics. Staff are effusive in their praise of this professional development and the impact is clear in pupils' workbooks where progress is accelerating in these subjects. Strong improvements to teaching in the early years have been supported by the work of a local authority consultant and a regular coaching arrangement with a local primary school in Newcastle.

You and your governing body are very positive about the recently appointed achievement partner, who has increased the level of support and challenge you are receiving from the local authority.

The governing body is working closely with the local authority to recruit a new

headteacher for the school. Both recognise the importance of maintaining stability in the school in the interim, to ensure that the school continues to improve rapidly. The governing body has already brokered a range of options, and is in the final stages of confirming arrangements, for the leadership of the school from September 2017.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector