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Mrs Susan Frost
Headteacher
Ashfield Junior School
High Street
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CA14 4ES

Dear Mrs Frost

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ashfield Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 May 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:

- raise standards of attainment further by ensuring that teachers address gaps in pupils' core knowledge in English and mathematics more swiftly and consistently.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other senior and middle leaders, and the chair and two other members of the governing body. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. You accompanied me on a series of short visits to classes, and I also looked at work in pupils' books and the school's assessment information. I spoke informally with pupils throughout the day and met with a group of Year 6 pupils to discuss their work. I also evaluated

the school's action plans and scrutinised other key documentation.

Context

You, the deputy headteacher and the subject leader for mathematics all took up your posts in the academic year prior to the school's most recent inspection. You have ensured that leadership at the school is now stable.

Main findings

You, along with the other members of the senior leadership team, have an honest and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. You have used this understanding as the basis for detailed improvement planning. The activities that have already been undertaken are having a positive impact on the quality of education in the school. It is clear that a corner has been turned and the school is now moving in the right direction.

The quality of governance has improved significantly. This was identified as an area for development at the previous inspection. Governors responded decisively to the findings of a review of governance, for example by reorganising their committee structure to place a greater focus on pupil outcomes. Governors are also now more aware of the need to provide greater challenge to school leaders by comparing the school's performance with other schools nationally. They are therefore holding leaders to account more effectively. Governors have also ensured that the school's website contains all of the required information and that statutory policy documents are properly updated.

The work of middle leaders, including subject leaders, is having a positive impact on school improvement. Leaders for English and mathematics have identified key areas for improvement in their subjects. They ensure that staff have good access to a range of professional development opportunities. Pupils who are identified as needing additional support in phonics now receive more targeted extra help. Teachers are ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills in mathematics. Teachers have taken new ideas on board well. As a result, teaching across the school is continuing to improve and is particularly effective at the upper end of school.

The leader responsible for the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is knowledgeable and ensures that support for these pupils is well-planned and delivered effectively. Consequently, these pupils progress well from their different starting points. This shows that leaders make effective use of the additional funding that they receive to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Evidence in pupils' books and the school's tracking information show that standards in writing have improved significantly. Pupils currently in Year 6 write with maturity,

using punctuation effectively to enhance their writing and convey meaning. The proportion of pupils writing at the expected standard, and whose writing exceeds that level, is improving strongly. This was seen very clearly, for example in impressive diary entries written from the point of view of soldiers in the Second World War.

Achievement in mathematics and reading are also improving, but attainment in these areas is not yet at the same level as in writing. This is because there is still a legacy of previous underachievement that has left pupils with gaps in their knowledge and understanding of some key skills. As a result, there are too many careless errors in pupils' work. Teachers do not consistently identify and address the gaps in pupils' basic skills with sufficient urgency. Consequently, progress in reading and mathematics, while improving, is not as rapid as it could be.

Positive progress is being made in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils currently in the school, which was another of the areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection. Tracking of disadvantaged pupils' progress is now more focused and is being used more effectively to target where pupils need additional academic or pastoral support.

You and your fellow leaders have also ensured that safeguarding is given a high priority throughout the school. Detailed checks are made on staff, governors, volunteers and regular visitors to the school to make sure that they are suitable people to work with children. Staff and governors receive regular training to ensure that their knowledge of good practice in safeguarding is up to date. You have established effective links with external agencies to make sure that pupils and their families receive the support that they need. Procedures to safeguard pupils' welfare are well established.

Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. They are eager to learn and tackle challenges in their work with determination and enthusiasm. This was evident in mathematics sessions in Year 6, where pupils worked very well together to solve problems involving shape and number sequences. Pupils say that they enjoy coming to school, and their attendance is typically above average. Behaviour around school and on the playground is good and pupils are polite and well-mannered. The school encourages pupils to develop a real awareness of what it means to be good citizens by getting involved in regular charity fundraising; pupils talk enthusiastically about this. British values are also promoted effectively and this helps pupils to develop a good understanding of important issues around democracy, tolerance and respect for others.

The curriculum provides pupils with a varied range of learning experiences which are enhanced well through extra-curricular clubs and educational visits. For example, pupils spoke enthusiastically about what they had learned on a visit to the Imperial War Museum and how much they had enjoyed their visit to the theatre in Keswick. Pupils are also proud to have had the chance to represent the school in

different events. Many have sung in the choir or been on the winning team in local swimming galas and tennis competitions.

External support

Since the inspection in May 2016, the school has benefited from effective, targeted support from the local authority. Specialist leaders of education from an outstanding local school have helped the leaders of English and mathematics to plan for and secure improvements in the effectiveness of teaching in their subjects. The school also works well with other schools in the area. Leaders are impressively outward-looking and are happy to learn from good practice that they see modelled elsewhere. The local authority is confident in the ability of leaders, including governors, to continue to improve the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Neil Dixon
Her Majesty's Inspector