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Mr Mark Outterside
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Outterside

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Westerhope Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 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 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that precise actions and measurable targets are set in the school improvement plan for all aspects of the school's work which require improvement
- urgently reduce persistent absence and improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, a group of middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and three other governors

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, accompanied by the deputy headteacher, to a number of classrooms. I looked at the work in pupils' workbooks to check on progress and talked informally to some pupils about their learning. I also met with 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Since the previous inspection, one teacher has left the school and has been replaced by another teacher. The assistant headteacher, who also oversees the school's work with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, has taken leave of absence. Another teacher has undertaken the national accreditation for special educational needs coordinators and is fulfilling that role. Following the inspection, three governors resigned their posts. You have appointed two new governors and are in the process of recruiting a third to meet the needs identified by a recent skills audit.

Main findings

Since the inspection, you have worked closely with the deputy headteacher to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve. New systems to manage the performance of teachers set ambitious targets, linked to the school's key priorities. Teachers are in no doubt about what is expected of them and they are rising to that challenge.

New 'impact teams' have ensured that staff are highly focused on the achievement of different groups of pupils and this is leading to better progress, for example for boys. Phase leaders have embraced their new roles with alacrity. They can clearly demonstrate how they are coaching and supporting staff, particularly with planning, to ensure that more teaching is securing good progress from pupils. For example, in mathematics, pupils' workbooks demonstrate that they are being given work which is more closely matched to their needs. You have given phase leaders the authority to respond immediately to deploy additional support where there is evidence that pupils need further help with their learning. This is enabling pupils to catch up more rapidly.

I am particularly impressed by leaders' work to develop the teaching of reading across the school. Following a reading audit, you introduced a new reading scheme and widened the range of books available. Pupils are highly enthused by this breadth of choice and the incentives you have introduced to reward them for reading. The deputy headteacher, supported by an external consultant, has provided coaching support to teaching staff to eradicate inconsistencies in the

quality of the teaching of reading in the classroom. You have also appointed additional staff, so that those pupils working below the expected standards read at least four times each week to an adult. This work has led to a substantial reduction in the proportion of pupils working below the standard expected for their age.

The quality of teaching in the early years is beginning to improve. In the Reception class, children work with greater purpose and independence. Teachers have higher expectations of what children can do and this is evident in the better quality writing in children's workbooks. You know that you have more to do to ensure that teaching is consistently good and to develop the outdoor learning curriculum, and have well-considered plans in place to address these issues.

You and the governing body recognise that, while your school improvement plan is focused on the correct priorities, in some areas it lacks the precise actions and measurable targets to improve key aspects of the school's performance. For example, while there is a small improvement in the overall attendance of pupils this academic year, too many pupils are still persistently absent from school and the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is not improving. Although you recognise that these issues need further attention, they have not been tackled with the same relentlessness and tenacity that you have applied to improving the quality of teaching in reading and mathematics.

Leaders acted with urgency to commission a review of governance following the inspection. Governors now have a better understanding of their roles and are increasingly confident to question school leaders. For example, they have challenged you to ensure a suitably aspirational rationale for target-setting for individual pupils. Following training to help them to analyse pupils' assessment information, governors are clear about what has improved in the school and what still needs to be addressed.

The recent review of pupil premium spending has given you some assurances about the systems you have in place to review the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. It also recognises that improvements to the quality of teaching are beginning to accelerate progress for disadvantaged pupils. However, the review has failed to give you the clarity you need about what is working well and what needs to be improved to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils rapidly.

External support

You have been proactive in seeking and brokering a range of external support to help you to improve the school. Staff are enthusiastic about the impact of the support they have received from consultants to improve their teaching, particularly in English and mathematics. The leader for mathematics has benefited from her links with the local mathematics 'hub' and is ensuring that there is better consistency in the quality of mathematics teaching across the school. The new coordinator for special educational needs values the input she has received from the

local authority adviser and this has given her the confidence to challenge staff to improve the precision of targets set for pupils.

You and your governing body are very positive about the local authority achievement partner who has provided you with helpful support to evaluate improvements to the quality of teaching. However, the achievement partner has not challenged you to ensure that your school development plan is robust enough to secure improvements against all of the areas identified at the previous inspection.

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