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Dear Mrs Black

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Busill Jones Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 July 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 February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- accelerate pupils' progress so that they achieve the standards appropriate for their age.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, six Year 6 pupils, three lunchtime supervisors and the chair of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with the local authority school improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I observed parts of lessons with you and considered the school's self-evaluation and development plan. I also looked at minutes of governors' meetings, your reports to governors, examples of your lesson observations and feedback to teachers, the record of staff training, action plans written by subject leaders, and detailed records of pupils' progress.

Context

At the time of the last inspection, you had been in post for five months. The deputy headteacher left the school at the end of the spring term in 2016. The assistant headteacher continues to cover the deputy headteacher's role since his departure. There have been considerable changes to staff over the last academic year.

Main findings

Since your appointment in September 2015, you lost no time in communicating your high expectations and identifying key priorities for school improvement. You quickly tackled weaknesses in the quality of teaching, provided training and support where needed and challenged wherever improvements were too slow to emerge. Weak teaching has now been eradicated. Staff, governors and pupils appreciate and value your constant drive for improvement. These improvements were at an early stage of implementation at the time of the last inspection in February 2016. Nevertheless, you tackled the identified areas for improvement with determination.

You introduced a new system to assess and track pupils' progress. You provided appropriate guidance and training on its use and you were clear that teachers were accountable for the progress made by pupils. There is now a strong culture of shared responsibility where excuses are no longer offered or accepted. The tracking system has helped staff to more accurately identify pupils' different capabilities. As a result, support is available for those who experience learning difficulties and additional challenges are given to the most able pupils. You introduced a new approach to teaching early reading skills and effectively supported staff with new resources. Phonics is now taught systematically, with a suitably strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills. Staff keep a close watch on pupils' progress so that effective support is provided to meet pupils' specific needs.

You and the subject leader for English have developed and communicated clear expectations regarding how writing should be taught, the concepts pupils must learn and the skills they must apply to all forms of written work. English and mathematics leaders suitably check teachers' plans every week to ensure that pupils

are taught the necessary knowledge and skills for their age. They observe lessons and regularly check pupils' books to make sure that teacher expectations are high. All staff are aware of the learning steps to be taken to reach age-related expectations by the end of each school year.

You and the staff have worked hard to set clear expectations of pupils' behaviour. You have developed a good balance of praise, rewards and sanctions and both teachers and pupils know their responsibility to ensure good behaviour in class and beyond. When we visited classrooms, pupils worked quietly, continued to concentrate, answered questions thoughtfully and were genuinely interested in the tasks provided. They showed a high level of mutual respect. You introduced staggered playtimes so that pupils had more room to play and had access to games and equipment. During my observation of pupils at lunchtime, they were suitably occupied, they played together cooperatively, as well as competitively, and enjoyed time with their friends.

You have moved the Reception classes to the Nursery area so staff can more readily share good practice. Staff quickly help children to become self-confident learners. Children enter Nursery and Reception with communication skills, particularly in speaking and listening, well below those expected for their age. Staff lose no time in assessing children's abilities and ensuring that children make good progress throughout the year. Nevertheless, the proportion achieving a good level of development remains below the national average because of their very low starting points.

You introduced methodical methods to check on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. All of the senior and middle leaders have now adopted these approaches, so that 'there's nowhere to hide'. They regularly check all aspects of work, such as teachers' lesson plans and pupils' books. They carefully assess pupils' progress, identify where improvements can be made, feedback to teachers, develop action plans and prepare reports on the identified improvements for governors. As a result, the necessary skills to manage subjects and phases have developed and everyone feels part of the initiatives to improve. You have developed a strong team spirit where everyone is honest about difficulties but encouraged to find solutions to problems. You have ensured that subject leaders have the time to fulfil their responsibilities. They are quickly developing in confidence and are increasingly independent in identifying the next steps for improvement.

Pupils are taught about a range of religions, beliefs and celebrations. You increase their awareness of different cultures through studies of art and music. Pupils are suitably aware of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and the different forms these aspects can take.

Governors welcomed the review of their role in May 2016. The chair of the governing body ensures that all governors receive regular training so that they have a clear understanding of their strategic role. Governors are increasingly able to

independently find and analyse information for themselves and seek answers to identified anomalies. The chair of the governing body has produced an excellent written introduction to governance which covers what is expected of the role, governors' responsibilities and the necessary tasks required to improve their effectiveness. Governors have their own action plan to ensure that they continue to develop.

Attendance remains below the national average. However, absence is tracked and appropriately challenged wherever necessary. Leaders know which pupils are persistently absent and actively seek reasons before involving external agencies to intervene. You do not authorise holidays in school time and make full use of the available legal steps to challenge poor attendance.

Your scrutiny of pupils' progress is detailed and comprehensive. You have shared clear expectations with staff and provided systems to inform their assessments and identify the next steps in learning. Pupils' work on display and in their books shows good progress, but attainment is not where it should be because pupils are still catching up from a legacy of prolonged underachievement. They have considerable gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding, particularly in English and mathematics, even though staff are diligent in helping pupils to catch up. You are aware of the need to accelerate pupils' progress as quickly as possible so that their attainment moves closer to that of other pupils nationally.

External support

The local authority school improvement partner knows the school well. She is suitably aware of the school's challenges and what school leaders and staff have done to bring about the necessary improvements. The improvement partner conducts regular checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and provides suitably detailed feedback to leaders to help the school move forward. The local authority provides a helpful range of support and training for governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector