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Peter Hollis
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Dear Mr Hollis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Oakhill 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 March 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 March 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 recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that opportunities for pupils to undertake problem-solving activities using reasoning in mathematics are fully embedded across all classes
- provide pupils with more opportunities to undertake extended pieces of independent writing
- ensure that success criteria in school improvement plans are more sharply focused on specific outcomes for pupils
- involve governors more in monitoring the impact that school improvement plans have in ensuring that all teaching is consistently good.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the mathematics subject leader, and four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I undertook learning walks with you and the deputy headteacher, and spoke to pupils. I examined pupils' books. I also analysed current attainment and attendance data and scrutinised notes of visits made by the local authority.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection in March 2016, the previous deputy headteacher has stepped down from the post but remains in school as leader of early years provision. An existing member of staff was appointed to the post of deputy headteacher in February 2017. Two teachers are leaving the school at the end of the summer term and new staff have been appointed to fill the vacancies from September 2017.

Main findings

You have shown determination to ensure that pupils at the school will attain higher outcomes by the time they leave the school. This is reflected in the encouraging provisional 2017 assessment information for pupils in Year 6 and Year 2. There has been an increase in the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 2 and more pupils are now working at greater depth. In Year 6 there has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils working at the expected standard in both reading and mathematics and a slight increase in writing. More pupils are now working at greater depth in these subjects.

The improvements have been the result of a clear focus from you and other leaders on ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can and should achieve and set work that is better matched to their abilities. The subject leader for mathematics has introduced a revised, whole-school approach for planning the teaching of this subject. Teachers are now required to plan lessons that have a range of activities that set varying levels of challenge for pupils of different ability. While these tasks are helping to pose higher levels of challenge, evidence gathered during the visit indicates that for the most able pupils, there are still times when the activities set are too easy for them.

There is a better focus on ensuring that pupils develop secure and age-appropriate skills and knowledge in computational skills, such as addition and division. Pupils now have increased opportunities to apply these skills in problem-solving using reasoning. However, this aspect of the teaching and learning of mathematics is not

yet fully embedded across all classes. You, together with other leaders, recognise that some problems do not require pupils to think deeply and are computational tasks written in words rather than investigative activities.

The teaching of writing has improved. The subject leader has worked closely with consultants commissioned by the local authority to ensure that pupils are provided with a rich and engaging series of class reading books that act as a stimulus for their writing. For example, during the visit, pupils in Year 1 were engrossed with the story 'Where the wild things are'. They used this as a starting point to answer questions in well-formed sentences, where they applied their knowledge of punctuation and grammar effectively. While pupils are provided with good opportunities to apply their writing skills in other subjects, such as science and history, opportunities for extended, independent writing are still not used as well as they could be.

The school's plans for tackling the areas identified for improvement at the recent inspection are well focused on the most pressing priorities. The plans have clearly stated actions and timescales for completion. While you have defined success criteria some of these would benefit from being more closely linked to specific outcomes for groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in reading, writing and mathematics. This would allow leaders to monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions taken on pupils' progress and attainment.

You have improved assessment systems in school and now ensure that teachers make better use of formal and regular tests in reading and mathematics alongside teacher assessments. Teachers benefit from working alongside their colleagues in the partner school in the federation to compare the accuracy of their assessments. This work is being extended to include other local schools.

Leaders have reviewed and revised the whole-curriculum plans and this is beginning to provide greater balance and breadth for pupils in their learning across all subjects. Evidence in pupils' books show that they are engaged by topics such as 'Extreme Weather' and 'Natural Disasters', which engage pupils' interest and develop their depth of knowledge in subjects such as geography and technology. Teachers ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to consider and discuss social and cultural issues, including the impact that diseases and illnesses have on people in different parts of the world. This is helping to support pupils' development as thoughtful and empathetic individuals who are well prepared for life in modern society.

The school administrative staff closely monitor attendance of all groups of pupils and provide leaders with detailed and regular reports. There are secure systems in place to ensure that parents are aware of their responsibilities in ensuring that their children attend regularly and on time. As a result, attendance has risen since the last inspection and is now only slightly below the national average.

Governors have a stronger understanding of the arrangements for and outcomes of teachers' performance management. They now use this information to ask appropriately challenging questions of school leaders about the quality of teaching. However, governors' monitoring of the impact of the school improvement plan is less secure.

External support

The local authority has provided effective and ongoing support to the school. Following the disappointing outcomes in the 2016 national assessments, the local authority increased the level of support provided to the school. They have commissioned consultants in English and mathematics to work with school leaders to develop their skills in bringing about improvements within their areas of responsibility. Consultants have undertaken regular and detailed monitoring activities. They have provided clear next steps for improvement and have reviewed the impact of the actions that the school has taken on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' outcomes. School leaders have welcomed and valued this support and have engaged fully in implementing all the recommendations that the local authority have made.

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

Adam Hewett
Her Majesty's Inspector