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Ms Tracy Campbell
Headteacher
Plantsbrook School
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Dear Ms Campbell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Plantsbrook 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 November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the trust 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:

- more clearly identify how far pupils, and groups of pupils, are away from their targets so that support and intervention can be more clearly targeted
- link clearly the actions that leaders take to the impact on pupils' outcomes
- carefully analyse this impact, to evaluate which actions are most effective, so that action plans become more manageable and streamlined.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, school leaders and governors, including the chair of the governing body, and members of the trust. The school improvement plan, self-evaluation and action plans were evaluated. I looked through a sample of pupils' work, a range of documentation and your tracking of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour. I spoke to a panel of pupils to evaluate their views on developments since the last inspection.

I evaluated leaders' work to keep pupils safe and scrutinised a range of documentation on a wide range of risk assessments, staff checks of the grounds and buildings, first aid records and staff training. I also undertook a site walk with senior leaders and spoke to pupils about their safety at school.

Context

Since the last inspection, governors have commissioned internal and external reviews of governance, and pupil premium spending and its impact. Four new governors have begun work in the trust or governing bodies. The governors have considered the structure of senior leaders' roles and have adjusted these so that responsibilities are clear and streamlined. A new subject leader for English has been appointed.

Main findings

Following the previous inspection, leaders swiftly developed an action plan that directly addressed each of the areas for improvement. Leaders are taking numerous, well-considered actions. As the year ends, leaders have evaluated the impact of these actions. However, they have not, in most cases, related them directly to outcomes for pupils. As a result, they cannot be sure which actions have had the most impact and which need to be adapted.

As a response to a commissioned review of teaching and learning, leaders have established new expectations of how teachers use pupils' information. Each class has a 'class profile' which brings together all of the information on a pupil's progress and attainment. It also outlines how teachers will meet pupils' specific educational needs. Leaders carefully audit teachers' use of the class profile to make sure that staff use it consistently. As a result, disadvantaged and most-able pupils' needs are being met more effectively in lessons. This is also the case for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's records show that teachers are using successful strategies more consistently to help individual pupils make stronger progress from their starting points.

Leaders have made their expectations on presentation in exercise books clear to staff and pupils. Pupils agree that these expectations are reiterated consistently. As a result, there is more consistency in pupils' presentation, and pupils can more

effectively use their exercise books to review their progress and revise.

Leaders have now fully implemented a marking policy which was new at the time of the last inspection. They make regular checks to make sure that teachers follow the policy. A sample of work, and leaders' evaluations, show that teachers follow the policy much more consistently. Where leaders discover that the policy is not being followed, they give swift and direct feedback to teachers so that they can meet the school's expectations. Pupils say that teachers are much more consistent in expecting them to review their own progress, correct their mistakes and adapt their work, as the school's policy requires.

The school's tracking shows that the gap between disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 and other pupils nationally with similar starting points has diminished this year. The progress of the small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has also improved, as has pupils' progress in English. Although leaders are cautious about their tracking and await this summer's results, they have undertaken marking scrutiny and moderation to establish the validity of their tracking. Leaders' tracking of Year 10 pupils' progress shows strong progress from starting points for all pupil groups. Leaders are focusing their tracking carefully on progress as well as attainment.

Leaders and governors have a more accurate view of pupils' progress across the school, based on evidence. They track groups of pupils' progress carefully using highly aspirational targets. However, they have not yet fully refined this tracking to make sure that they understand how far pupils and groups of pupils are from their targets.

Leaders have refined their work on careers information, advice and guidance. They have made sure that they give Year 11 pupils information about a wider range of post-16 providers so that pupils can make an informed choice on their next steps. For pupils who have not made firm decisions about their next steps by February of Year 11, leaders provide follow-up meetings. This means that pupils and their families have all of the information that they need. As a result, almost all of the current Year 11 pupils have firm plans for their destinations this year.

As a result of leaders' early interventions and clearer expectations, fixed-term exclusions have reduced overall, and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Repeat fixed-term exclusions have also reduced.

The school is moving to a new building imminently. During this building work, leaders have kept pupils well informed about how to keep themselves safe. They have undertaken regular site surveys to identify where hazards are, and taken steps to minimise risk to pupils. Across a range of activities, such as trips, leaders make sure that risks are appropriately assessed and managed.

External support

Following the previous inspection, leaders quickly undertook internal reviews of pupil premium funding and governance while they waited for external reviewers to become available. Once reviewers were available, external reviews were completed.

As a response to the pupil premium review, leaders swiftly appointed the new chair of the governing body as the governor with responsibility for pupil premium, reflecting the importance of this work. All teachers now consider disadvantaged pupils' needs specifically in their planning, and leaders check this. Academic coaches focus on helping disadvantaged pupils with their specific, individual barriers to success. A baseline of pupils' attainment is taken before and after interventions take place. This means that leaders have a clearer view of the impact of interventions. These actions have begun to diminish the difference between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.

An external review of governance was undertaken, and a new chair of the local governing body appointed. In response to the recommendations of the review, she has reformed the application process for new governors so that the governing body can be sure that new governors have the knowledge, skills, experience and commitment for the role. The application and induction programme involves interviews, tours of the school, training and a probationary period. Four new governors have been appointed using this process. The trust board has established a finance committee separate from the main governing body. This is allowing the local governing body to focus more closely on improving pupils' outcomes.

Minutes from meetings show that governors are more capable and willing to ask probing questions of senior staff. They submit many of these questions in advance and the questions are well formed to identify key issues and strategic priorities for the school.

The school has commissioned a national leader of education to undertake a review of the quality of teaching and learning. This review is wide ranging and has helped school leaders to focus their efforts appropriately.

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

Yours sincerely

Dan Owen
Her Majesty's Inspector