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Mrs Trisha Donkin
Holly Spring Junior School
Lily Hill Road
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Dear Mrs Donkin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holly Spring Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 19 September 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 July 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- recover the previously strong attendance figures by improving the attendance of groups, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- ensure that governors and leaders have a precise understanding of which areas of teaching need to improve the most, and tackle these rapidly.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you and your two new deputy headteachers to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Meetings were also held with three subject leaders, a representative of the local authority, and the incoming chair of the governing body. I held a telephone conversation with the existing chair of the governing body. Together with senior leaders, I made short visits to lessons in each year group, where a selection of pupils' books and teachers' assessment records were examined. I reviewed a wide range of documents including the single central register, the school's website, attendance records, monitoring and action planning documents and several policies. I observed breaktime and met with a small group of pupils. I met some parents informally at the beginning of the day and considered 51 responses to the online survey, Parent View.

Context

There has been a period of staffing turbulence and considerable change in the leadership of the school. Since the previous inspection, a total of six teachers have left the school and been replaced. You restructured your senior leadership team last spring by appointing an additional deputy headteacher, who now has responsibility for pastoral matters and leadership of pupil premium. This has enabled you to take an active role in the leadership and restructuring of teaching, learning and assessment. During last summer term, your other deputy headteacher left the school and her replacement took up post at the beginning of this term. Additionally, you have appointed new leaders of writing and mathematics this year. The governing body has worked with the local authority with a view to strengthening governance. A new chair of the governing body is being appointed this week.

Main findings

You have worked hard to overcome significant challenges, which arose following the previous inspection. Despite high staff turnover, a series of challenging circumstances and a large number leaders being new to their roles, the school is improving. However, the pace of this improvement towards meeting the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection has been limited by these factors. More recently, you have worked with the local authority and gained support from a local primary school. This has enabled you to take decisive action to restructure your teaching and assessment of mathematics and English this year. Consequently, staff are able to better understand the curriculum requirements and target their planning and teaching on meeting the needs of the pupils.

As a result of teacher training, and support from another school to moderate pupils' work, teachers have become more skilled in their understanding of the national curriculum requirements in English and mathematics. This, together with your setting of ambitious termly targets, has challenged teachers to have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Provisional key stage 2 outcome

information shows slight improvements in 2017 compared to the previous year. The proportions of pupils achieving the expected and higher standards in reading and mathematics assessments improved. Nevertheless, the standards achieved in 2017 are still well below national levels. Last year, the outcomes in writing dipped. However, better moderation has ensured that teachers are now more accurate in their assessment of pupils' writing skills. You and your new leadership team are aware of the urgency of continued improvements to teaching and learning, and of refining monitoring systems across the school.

Our visits to classrooms identified how most teachers have used your new school assessment systems, introduced this term, to adapt their lessons to better meet the pupils' starting points. Leaders are aware that there is more to do to ensure consistently high-quality teaching and learning across the school. This is needed to accelerate pupils' progress, in order to enable a greater proportion of them to achieve age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Further work is needed to ensure that teachers and leaders accurately monitor the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, and other groups of pupils, over time.

During our visits to lessons, we observed that nearly all teachers have adopted the school's new marking and feedback policy. There is some variability across the school in terms of the impact this is having at this early stage. However, we did see some strong examples of teachers' high expectations and use of assessment, enabling them to refine and improve learning activities. For example, in a Year 6 English lesson pupils were taking great pride in responding to the teacher's feedback to improve the quality of their extended creative writing. Similarly, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson the teacher used their assessment of pupils' prior understanding to devise different activities to support some pupils who needed to catch up, and to provide increased challenge to others. As a result, the lower-prior-attaining pupils were supported to develop their skills. The most able pupils were challenged to demonstrate and explain their in-depth reasoning and problem-solving tasks.

You have worked with the local authority in order to redesign your school self-evaluation and improvement planning. You have a new plan in place, which contains some suitable actions. However, it is not yet a sharp enough tool for driving the swift improvements that are needed. It does not accurately identify starting points, clarify lines of accountability or set specific milestones by which to measure the impact of your actions. This year, many leaders are new to their roles. While some training has already occurred and further training is planned, these leaders need crystal-clear priorities outlined in a detailed improvement plan in order to enable them to effectively raise standards in the timescales required.

A detailed external review of the school's pupil premium strategy was conducted and leaders have sought to take up recommendations to improve the reading and writing resources made available to disadvantaged pupils. However, more needs to be done to track the progress that these pupils are making in class and ensure that

classroom teaching is meeting their needs. Subject leaders are aware that they need to ensure that their monitoring and tracking of the progress made by different groups of pupils in their subject areas is more robust.

In 2016, the overall attendance was above the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities was particularly low. Last year, the overall attendance figure fell to below national average and the attendance of these vulnerable groups fell to levels that are significantly below national figures. Leaders have systems to ensure regular liaison with home and to involve outside agencies, where necessary, to target improvements to attendance. However, although leaders monitor individual pupils, they do not routinely analyse the effectiveness of school systems by monitoring the attendance of different groups of pupils. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency in order for governors to hold leaders to account for the impact of their actions to improve attendance, meet the needs of these groups and accelerate the progress they make.

Governors identified that they required support and to increase their numbers. Working with the local authority, they sought and successfully recruited a highly experienced new chair of the governing body, who will shortly be taking up post. The existing chair is dedicated to the school and will remain an active governor. Aware that they need training on the use of performance information, in order to better hold leaders to account, the incoming chair and local authority have strategies in place to achieve this. It is too early yet to see the impact of these changes. The school website is currently in the process of being redeveloped. Governors are aware that there is further work to do to ensure that the school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

External support

The quality and frequency of external support has improved. You now benefit from regular visits from local authority subject advisers and a comprehensive package of training for leaders and teachers. This has assisted improvement in curriculum planning and begun the process of refining leaders' school self-evaluation and improvement planning. The local authority has brokered support from another local primary school. This has enabled training for teachers, resulting in improved understanding of national curriculum requirements and more accurate moderation of pupils' work. The support provided by the local authority in arranging the external review of pupil premium has resulted in a helpful report, which has aided improvements.

Wisely, this comprehensive package of support from the local authority is planned to continue this year. After the delay caused by the challenging circumstances of last year, school leaders and the local authority are aware of the urgent need to work in continued partnership to fully embed the new initiatives introduced this year.

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

Yours sincerely

Matthew Newberry
Her Majesty's Inspector