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Mr J Goulding
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Dear Mr Goulding

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodcroft First School

Following my visit to your school on 20 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- complete the external review of governance and act upon recommendations
- ensure that all required information is available on the school's website
- make sure that development plans fully reflect the areas for improvement from the previous inspection and any other emerging issues
- develop a strategic plan and monitoring cycle for the promotion of pupils' understanding of fundamental British values.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and assistant

headteacher, the governing body and a national leader of education. I spoke with Staffordshire's commissioner for school improvement via the telephone. I reviewed the school's development plan and self-evaluation. I visited almost all classes during a learning walk in the afternoon. I reviewed a range of pupils' books to ascertain the extent to which progress is being made over time. The learning walk and book scrutiny were undertaken jointly with the headteacher. During discussions with leaders and governors the following documents were reviewed: the single central record, monitoring records, checks on the impact that teaching is having on learning, findings from the pupil premium review, and findings from reviews undertaken with a local teaching school alliance.

Context

Since the last inspection the headteacher has retired. The deputy headteacher was appointed as acting headteacher for three terms and became substantive headteacher at the start of this academic year. An assistant headteacher has been appointed and began her new role in September. A new chair of governors has led the governing body since January 2017. The school has undergone a process of staff reorganisation.

Main findings

At the last inspection, leaders and governors were asked to improve two key areas and undertake reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium.

The first area for development was to improve the quality of leadership, management and governance by ensuring: monitoring and evaluation systems are robust; leaders use assessment information effectively; governors are provided with detailed information on outcomes; pupils' understanding of fundamental British values are well promoted; the school's website meets requirements; and parents are better informed about their children's progress.

Leaders and governors' evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the school is accurate. While some improvements have been secured, there is more to do. You have prioritised improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. This has resulted in several developments. However, some key areas of school improvement have not been addressed with sufficient rigour. Monitoring systems and development plans do not adequately address key issues. As a result, at this stage, some areas are underdeveloped. The school is not yet progressing with sufficient pace to ensure that it is at least good at its next inspection.

Monitoring systems have developed in some respects. For example, you and leaders have devised a clear outline for activities to check on the impact that teaching is having on learning. Over the last nine months a national leader of education has supported you with these checks. You have devised additional in-class support to

respond to your findings and support teachers. As a result, teaching is having a greater impact on outcomes but there is more work to be done.

Teachers and leaders are now clearer about the achievement of pupils. You are able to pinpoint the performance of different groups and are beginning to use this information to inform planning. However, the developments in assessment are quite new at this stage. Governors have not yet had an opportunity to scrutinise data or explore any variations in performance.

A range of activities are used to make judgements about pupils' outcomes. This has increased the reliability of the information you hold and gives you a valuable insight into the performance of different groups. The progress secured by different groups has been variable over the last 12 months. For example, disadvantaged pupils' overall performance, boys' literacy and girls' mathematics have emerged as areas for development in some areas of the school. Governors now plan to analyse this data and work with leaders to establish actions to address variations. This will allow governors to track performance more closely and ensure leaders are held to account.

Some early work has begun to support the development of pupils' understanding of fundamental British values. However, this area does not have a plan that sets out what the school will do and when. As a result, governors do not have milestones they can monitor to check on developments.

The school's website does not meet the requirements set out by the Department for Education. You have a new website which you hope to launch in the near future.

Communication with parents has improved considerably. The vast majority of parents that I spoke to hold positive views about Woodcroft. They are particularly pleased with the establishment of a parent council. Parents report that they are kept up to date on their children's progress and that they welcome the openness and approachability of staff.

The second area for the school to improve was the quality of teaching and learning. At the last inspection you were asked to ensure: teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve; there are more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills; the teaching of phonics is accurate; and teachers make better use of assessment information.

Pupils' writing and mathematics books demonstrate that teachers' expectations are rising. However, the picture is mixed across the school. Consistently high expectations were not evident during the learning walk that we undertook. This was also the case in some books that we reviewed, particularly for most-able pupils.

Specifically, high expectations are not routinely evident across the wider curriculum. Activities do not fully engage children or offer them sufficient opportunities to apply and improve their basic skills. In some classes, low level disruption is not fully

addressed. As a result, pupils can lose concentration and are not adequately challenged. Conversely, in other classes on our walk, younger children were engrossed in their learning and undertaking investigations. Children in one Reception class were exploring nocturnal animals. They were animated and busy describing the animals that might live in different places. A range of activities were in place to complement learning and secure strong progress.

Mathematics books show that pupils are being given opportunities to apply their skills. This has been a particular focus of the support received from the national leader of education and specialist leader of education. Pupils are routinely using reasoning to solve mathematical problems. However, we agreed that there is scope for the most able pupils to receive an even greater level of challenge.

The teaching of phonics has improved considerably. Leaders recognised that they needed to adopt a more systematic and rigorous approach to teaching. As a result, phonics sessions now take place on a daily basis and any underachievement is quickly addressed. Provisional outcomes for 2017, indicate that a very high proportion of pupils passed the national Year 1 phonics screening check.

Teachers are making better use of assessment in some subjects. They use their knowledge about what pupils can do to devise appropriate plans and activities. This is proving more successful in English and mathematics than in the wider curriculum. The positive changes that have taken place in core subjects should now be transferred to subjects such as history and geography.

The school was asked to undertake a review of governance and the use of pupil premium. A review of governance first began in Autumn 2016. This was not completed in full and no clear actions were either sustained or monitored over time. Governors have paid attention to the structure of the governing body, how they support school improvement and how they provide challenge. However, the completion of the external review and any resulting recommendations must now be undertaken as soon as possible.

The review of the use of pupil premium has proven to be effective and worthwhile. Although some gaps remain in disadvantaged pupils' achievement, leaders have a handle on weaknesses and are acting upon them.

Given the shortcomings in several key areas, Ofsted will continue to monitor the school.

External support

The school has worked with the local authority and a national leader of education to bring about improvements. While support from the national leader of education has brought about key improvements to teaching, several other areas of the school have not been addressed with sufficient urgency. Development plans do not fully draw upon the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Some fundamental

aspects of the school, including the promotion of British values, website compliance and a full review of governance, have not been adequately developed. This must now happen with greater urgency. The school will require additional support to achieve these aims.

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

Jonathan Keay
Her Majesty's Inspector