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Dear Mr Canadine

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Helpringham School

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I spoke with three members of the governing body and a group of pupils. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. I considered a range of documentation, including whole-school and subject improvement plans, the latest self-evaluation document, the most recent information on pupils' progress and attainment, and safeguarding records. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work. I spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day.

Context

Since the previous section 5 inspection, one new teacher has joined the school as the subject leader for mathematics. You and the lead teacher now share the responsibility for safeguarding and special educational needs.

Main findings

Teachers now have a much more secure understanding of the expectations in English and mathematics for their particular year group. Even at this early stage of the academic year, pupils' mathematics workbooks show a good level of challenge for pupils of different abilities. For example, pupils in Year 4 were subtracting two numbers using hundreds, tens and units while some most-able pupils were using thousands.

Teachers are now using the school's assessment system accurately. As a result, pupils are making faster progress. Information you provided indicates that the vast majority of pupils are making good progress. They are working at age-related expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. You hold frequent meetings with subject leaders to discuss pupils' progress. You identify pupils who may be falling behind and quickly give them the help they need to catch up.

You have successfully ensured that the three 'Ps' of pride, presentation and positive behaviour have been fully adopted by all staff and pupils. Pupils are taking increased care over their work. They are proud to have it displayed in classrooms and corridors. For example, pupils in the Year 5/6 class told me they have had extra handwriting practice and they are rewarded for the good presentation of their work.

You organised an external review of the pupil premium funding in February 2017. This proved valuable in ensuring that this additional funding is allocated well. You made careful checks on how effectively the funds were used. The governor responsible for pupil premium funding was involved in this process and kept other governors fully informed. A further meeting between the governor and the reviewer is planned for later this month. The difference between the standards reached by the school's disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally is diminishing, but you recognise that it is still too large.

You have successfully raised standards in writing. In 2017, all of the pupils in Year 6 achieved at the expected standard. A large proportion of pupils achieved the expected standard in the spelling, grammar and punctuation test. This is because the subject leader has a good understanding of the strengths and development areas in the subject. Pupils have frequent opportunities to develop their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills in extended pieces of writing across the curriculum. The local authority moderated these judgements in 2017 to ensure their accuracy.

Subject leaders in English and mathematics are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

They have undergone relevant training and have a clear timetable of monitoring activities for each term, including lesson observation and work scrutiny. The activities are valuable in identifying strengths and development areas in teachers' practice and sharing them with staff. The subject leaders have benefited greatly from links with specialist consultants. Cluster meetings with leaders in other schools have helped them to share good practice and moderate pupils' work. These have ensured that their judgements are secure and teachers' assessments are accurate. Subject leaders now receive dedicated leadership time each week. This ensures that standards of work in pupils' books remain high and teachers continue to build on their existing good practice.

The whole-school and subject improvement plans are now sharply focused on the areas for improvement identified during the previous section 5 inspection. They contain measurable success criteria and specific dates for actions to be completed. These are helping governors to check progress with the plans regularly and provide greater challenge to leaders. As a result, improvements are taking place at a rapid pace.

The school's arrangements for recruiting and checking staff before they start working at the school meet current requirements. Pupils told me they enjoyed school, and felt happy and safe.

In every lesson we visited, pupils' attitudes to learning were extremely positive and they were fully engaged in their work. The behaviour of the pupils was consistently good. Parents with whom I spoke were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the recent improvements made. One commented, 'My child absolutely loves it here. I can't fault it!'

External support

The local authority is providing effective support for the school. For example, it helps you and the subject leaders to evaluate the quality of teaching and the attainment and progress of pupils. You welcome their valuable input and the challenge they bring on the impact of your leadership.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter Stonier
Her Majesty's Inspector