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Gillian Gupta and Rebecca Morgan
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Dear Mrs Gupta and Mrs Morgan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wyvern School

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 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 to become a good school.

The school's leaders and governors should take further action to ensure that:

- teachers' expectations are all equally high and there is greater consistency in the implementation of these raised expectations
- there is sufficient capacity to continue the more effective approach to supporting pupils with additional behavioural needs
- teachers and assistants pick up on, and quickly tackle, any misconceptions that become apparent when pupils apply their phonic knowledge in their writing
- teaching in mathematics enables pupils to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding at a deeper level
- pupils are given more opportunities to write at length, especially in humanities topics.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Separate meetings were also held with a group of subject leaders, year group leaders, governors, including the chair of the governing body (known as the governing board), a representative from the local authority, the headteacher of the local junior school that has been providing support, and with parents informally at the end of the school day. I reviewed a sample of pupils' work, documents relating to school improvement planning, evaluations of the school's performance, attendance data and the single central record, which collates the checks made when staff are appointed.

Context

The headteacher is currently on long-term leave of absence. The two deputy headteachers took up their roles as acting headteachers at the start of this academic year. Both the acting headteachers were on maternity leave during most of last academic year, including when the previous inspection took place. While the deputy headteachers were on maternity leave, two year-group leaders were appointed as acting deputy headteachers. The school has been supported by its main transition partner junior school and a primary school in Northamptonshire. Since the last inspection, the governing board has recruited a number of new governors to its ranks.

Main findings

The progress made since the previous inspection has been too slow. Over the past academic year, leaders have not done enough to improve the school. As a result, some aspects have declined and some have remained static. However, you are now taking the school in the right direction. You are wisely implementing some long-overdue, planned actions and also adopting some totally new approaches, such as a new way of teaching phonics. The changes you are putting in place are carefully considered and well executed but are still in their infancy. They are, therefore, not yet having a consistent impact across the school. Both of you are resolute that from now on the school will improve at a more constant pace. You recognise that there are no quick fixes and are determined to ensure that the changes you are making are far-reaching, effective and sustainable.

Some changes designed to reduce rates of pupils' persistent absence, planned by leaders following the previous inspection, failed to materialise. As a result, persistent absence increased last academic year and was well above national averages for the previous year. This year, you are systematically implementing a number of actions outlined in last year's plans, which you believe have the potential to make a positive difference. For example, you are introducing a breakfast club and establishing a system for rewarding good attendance. However, these strategies are not yet fully embedded in day-to-day practice. You are monitoring the impact of

new approaches on pupils' attendance with greater frequency and care than hitherto. You are wisely making additional follow-on changes where your checks indicate that further action is required. These include working more closely with parents.

Since the start of this academic term, you have successfully prioritised monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, you are establishing a more accurate picture of where strengths and weaknesses in teachers' practice lie. You have been assisted well in this by leaders in partner schools, who have verified the accuracy of your judgements. You are making very effective use of the information you have gleaned from your checks to identify individual and school-wide training needs. The teaching staff are responding well to this tighter approach to quality assuring their work. They are confident that you will provide them with the assistance they need to develop their practice. You acknowledge that while this approach is rapidly helping to get the school back on track, in the long term leaders need to develop their skills in quality assuring the work of the staff they line manage.

You sensibly recognise that one of the key reasons why improvement rates to date have been too slow is the low expectations that some teachers have of their pupils. You are steadfastly raising teachers' expectations using a number of carefully considered strategies. For instance, you are rightly emphasising this aspect of their practice in the feedback you provide for teachers, following your checks on the quality of teaching. As a consequence, some teachers have successfully raised their expectations and are ensuring that pupils meet them. However, in a number of classes, teachers have not laid out their expectations clearly enough. In these classes, teachers allow pupils to speak over them and play when they should be completing the work they have been set. In addition, during the last academic year, leaders did not successfully manage the challenging behaviour displayed by a small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You are determinedly changing the culture in the school so the behaviour of pupils with additional needs is managed more expertly and in a more proactive way. However, at the moment, there is limited capacity for leaders with expertise in this field to train their colleagues in these approaches or extend their own work with targeted pupils.

You have astutely prioritised raising the proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check, so it is more in line with national averages. You have effectively conducted a root and branch review of the way phonics is taught and introduced a totally new approach. In order to ensure that the approach is properly implemented, staff have received the full complement of training required. You have also appointed a lead teacher for phonics to provide teaching staff with day-to-day guidance. In most classes there is a high degree of consistency in the way teachers demonstrate how to segment words and how to blend sounds together. Pupils are increasingly confident in reading words that follow phonic patterns and are learning to recognise those that do not. However, when

pupils apply their phonic knowledge in their writing, some teachers and assistants are not picking up on the mistakes they make. Some mistakes indicate that pupils have misconceptions that may become entrenched if they are not tackled.

Approaches to teaching mathematics and writing that have been introduced do not go far enough in developing pupils' abilities in these subjects. In particular, teachers do not always set pupils tasks that require them to apply their mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding to real-life mathematical problems. You are aware of this and are making further, more far-reaching changes. These changes are not yet consistent across all classes. In addition, pupils are not always given enough opportunity to write at length, even when humanities topics, such as the Great Fire of London, lend themselves to extended writing. The amount pupils write in their topic books is constrained by the fact that the books are not lined and t`

External support

At the end of the last academic year, the local authority board that coordinates support from partner schools judiciously decided that the school needed extra assistance. Additional help is now in place and working well. One of the main reasons for this is that you are crystal clear about how you will evaluate the impact of any additional support received. Over the last few months, the board has rightly strengthened the way it monitors the school. For instance, it has more vigorously challenged school leaders to account for the pace of change. Local authority representatives recognise that in the last academic year, complex staffing issues had a negative impact on the pace of improvement. They have well-founded optimism that you will move the school forward, taking staff, pupils and parents with you. Some parents commented to me that they were noticing improvements in a number of areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard
Her Majesty's Inspector