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Miss Ruth Beckett
Associate Executive Principal
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Dear Miss Beckett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Strand Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 2 November 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 June 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in June 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are 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:

- develop the teaching of reading by building on the newly introduced approaches, so that pupils make faster progress in key stage 2 and an increasing proportion reach and exceed the expected standard by the end of Year 6.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative from the trust to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and spent time reviewing school documentation relating to: performance management; pupil assessment information; monitoring of teaching and learning; and governance. I

observed teaching and learning with you in all of the classes and we spoke to pupils and scrutinised their work. I also reviewed the checks that are made on the suitability of adults to work with children.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been substantial staffing changes. You have been appointed as associate executive principal and began your post in September 2016. The head of academy began her post in September 2017 and the assistant principal, who was seconded to the school from September 2016, began her permanent role in September 2017. Both you and the head of academy have split your roles between two local schools within the Delta Academy Trust. Three teachers are new to the school since the last inspection, including one recently qualified teacher. The chair and vice-chair of the governing body are also new to their posts since the last inspection. Since September 2017, staffing has become much more stable.

Main findings

You are leading the school with sheer determination to improve outcomes for pupils. Your high expectations are clearly evident in all aspects of the school's work and you have successfully secured the commitment of the whole staff team in realising your vision for the school. You have been keen for staff to learn from the good practice of others. Partnership with a local school within the trust has been instrumental in bringing about the encouraging signs of improvement seen so far. Staff morale is high and teachers have become more reflective about the effect of their teaching on pupils' learning.

Leaders are very accurate in their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Realistic and thorough evaluation has helped senior leaders to tenaciously tackle the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems have helped you improve the quality of teaching. As a result, by the end of key stage 1 in 2017, a substantially increased proportion of pupils, much closer to the national average, met and exceeded the expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. However, you recognise that continuing to establish the changes you have implemented will be critical to improving outcomes further still.

The main barrier to the pace of improvement has been the turbulence experienced with staffing. However, with support from the governors and the trust, you have now secured a much more stable staff team. Over the last year, there has been substantial development in leadership capacity and consequently the pace of improvement is quickly gathering momentum. You are acutely aware of the work still to do though, particularly in improving pupils' progress and attainment by the end of key stage 2 where a legacy of underachievement has hindered pupils' achievement. By the end of Year 6 in 2017, progress was significantly below the

national average in reading, writing and mathematics.

Leaders and governors are also keenly aware of the need to raise reading standards throughout the school following disappointing 2017 outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check and in the key stage 2 reading test. Leaders have just introduced a trust-wide approach to the teaching of reading to address this urgent priority. However, at present, it is too early to assess the impact of this very new strategy.

A new approach to the teaching of mathematics, which you introduced throughout the school from September 2017, is already proving very successful. Having been effectively used in Year 6 last year and resulting in much improved attainment from 22% of pupils reaching the mathematics standard in 2016 to 58% in 2017, you have now implemented the approach across the school. Pupils feel that teachers match mathematical tasks correctly to their needs and abilities so that they are able to deepen and extend their learning more readily than before. This is allowing greater challenge for all pupils and in particular for the most able. A focus on planning for small steps in pupils' learning has supported teachers' subject knowledge and their effectiveness in setting tasks which help pupils to make good progress in their learning. Pupils are also developing greater independence. They are very clear that teachers do not give them the answers but give them clues that help them to work answers out for themselves. Improved attainment at the end of Years 2 and 6 in 2017 demonstrates how these new strategies are making a difference. Leaders are also aware that some pupils still need to secure their basic understanding of number facts and are working with teachers to address this.

The school's tracking and monitoring systems show that teaching is having an increasingly positive influence on pupils' progress. Work in books and lessons also reflects this, with pupils showing more rapid gains in their learning. Leaders use their subject knowledge to good effect to professionally challenge each other when checking on the effect of teaching on pupils' learning. Regular reviews of pupils' attainment and progress help teachers to identify precise next steps for groups and individuals. Teachers also regularly review the impact of their teaching in joint staff training with their local partnership school. For example, they compare pupils' achievement in workbooks from the same year group and subject. Consequently, teachers are open to reflecting on the effectiveness of their teaching and are keen to continually make improvements. Some inconsistencies between classes and year groups remain; however, you have identified where this is the case and have put appropriate support in place to redress the balance and ensure that ambitious targets are met. Directors of learning, lead teachers and senior leaders model good practice and provide coaching and mentoring for staff. Clear targets for improvement are set for staff and leaders have eradicated all inadequate teaching.

Another notable success has been in improving leadership capacity through links with other schools and with the support of the trust. This now means that a wider team of leaders is quickly developing the skills and confidence to sustain the improvements made so far and to increase the pace of further development.

External support

The academy trust is providing very strong support and challenge for school leaders. Directors of learning and lead teachers from the trust provide a strong model of good practice which is developing the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment. Trust-wide procedures and systems, such as a revised approach to action planning for the use of pupil premium funding, are now enabling governors to hold leaders more rigorously to account. Teachers and leaders have benefited from learning from good practice in other academy trust schools and beyond. Shared leadership roles, spanning across two local trust schools, have been pivotal to increasing leadership capacity within the school. Regular trust review meetings make sure that the impact of leaders' actions are under rigorous review. Consequently, the pace of improvement is quickening.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector