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Mr Peter Fowlie
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Dear Mr Fowlie

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Arnbrook Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the chief executive officer of the Believe Trust, members of the local governing body and a trustee, a director of the trust, the leaders of mathematics, disadvantaged pupils and behaviour, and members of staff who are responsible for attendance and pupils' spiritual and cultural development. I visited most classes and jointly observed a lesson with the headteacher. I also spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day and to a group of pupils. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

At the previous inspection, leaders were asked to improve the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics in key stage 2, and improve the progress of

disadvantaged pupils and the most able. In addition, leaders and governors were asked to monitor the use of the funding for disadvantaged pupils and also have an external review of this use of this funding. Finally, leaders were asked to improve pupils' behaviour in classes, pupils' attendance and develop pupils' spirituality and cultural development.

Three teachers left the school at the end of the summer term in 2017 and three teachers were appointed to replace them.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders are highly committed and enthusiastic in their roles. They are making improvements, but they appreciate there is a lot more to do. Pupils' behaviour and attendance have improved. Pupils' spiritual and cultural development has been enhanced. The good quality of teaching in the early years has been sustained. Finally, although the quality of teaching though the school remains inconsistent, it is beginning to improve. Pupils are starting to make better progress, but the progress still needs to be accelerated, particularly in key stage 2, for pupils to achieve as well as they should.

The pupils' assessments at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 were very disappointing. The pupils' progress deteriorated from 2016 in all three subjects and their progress in mathematics was below the government's current floor standards. Following the inspection in January 2017, leaders did take swift action to improve the quality of teaching in key stage 2. However, it was too late to evaluate its impact on outcomes at the end of that academic year.

Children's outcomes in the early years in 2017 were just below the national average. However, the children had made good progress from their starting points. Disadvantaged children made very good progress and their outcomes rose sharply to be just below the national average.

In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2017, the proportion of pupils who met the standard rose sharply and is now above the national average. Furthermore, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who met the standard also rose sharply, although it is still below the national average.

Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 in 2017 at the expected standard for age in reading and mathematics was just below the national average. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved highly in writing and mathematics increased to be just below the national average. No pupils in 2016 had achieved highly in these subjects. This shows evidence of the leaders' capacity to make improvements to pupils' outcomes.

Leaders have set high expectations for the quality of teaching. The improvement plan is focusing on the right priorities to improve the school. Leaders are checking

regularly on the quality of pupils' work in all subjects to see if it is improving. Parents feel the school is improving. Teachers are pitching the work accurately to meet the needs of the less able and the middle attaining pupils. Consequently, these groups of pupils are beginning to make progress. However, the most able pupils are not being challenged well enough to make good progress.

Leaders have provided training to improve the teaching of mathematics. The leader for mathematics is very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching through the school. Alongside other leaders, he has checked pupils' work to see how well they are achieving. However, he has had limited opportunities to observe teaching, following the training, to support staff further to improve their teaching. The quality of teaching for mathematics is not consistently good through the school.

Where teaching is more effective, teachers quickly adapt the tasks to meet pupils' needs. For example, when a pupil was clearly struggling with numbers, the work was changed quickly to enable the pupil to understand the concept and make progress. However, through the school, teachers are not consistently checking that pupils can complete the tasks set, or adapting the tasks, to meet the needs of pupils. For example, some pupils were asked to answer some appropriately challenging questions about the times of buses using a bus timetable in mathematics. However, teachers had not checked that pupils understood how to read a timetable well enough in order for them to answer questions. This caused confusion, was not rectified quickly, and slowed the pupils' progress.

Frequently, the most able pupils find their mathematics work too easy. The tasks are not varied enough to make them think hard and make good progress. Most of these pupils know their times tables, but yet are not asked more difficult questions to apply their knowledge and make further progress.

Scrutiny of pupils' mathematics work shows that although pupils are given opportunities to problem-solve and reason mathematically, they practise their times tables much more frequently. The impact of the training for teachers is evident in pupils' work, which is improving. In the early years, children were splitting up numbers to find different totals to make a number. They were enthusiastically engaged and could count the apparatus accurately. Pupils in Year 1 were given three mathematical statements and asked to say which one was incorrect. The pupils in these year groups are making good progress.

Pupils in key stage 2 are asked to write down their explanations to mathematical problems. Although these explanations are often wrong, they are marked as correct. Moreover, pupils often do not have sufficient time to complete these tasks. Leaders accept that teachers' subject knowledge of mathematics has limitations. More training is planned to rectify this shortcoming.

Pupils have regular opportunities to produce extended pieces of writing. The writing

tasks are linked to topics and educational visits to spark pupils' imagination. For example in Year 6, pupils visited the Galleries of Justice and wrote a letter to a judge. Pupils are keen to write and have a good knowledge of the different types of sentences to use to make their writing more interesting. Pupils are making steady progress in their writing, particularly in improving their punctuation. However, leaders have recognised pupils' sentence structure and use of ambitious vocabulary are limited. Teachers do not consistently expect pupils to use ambitious vocabulary in their writing in key stages 1 and 2. In contrast, teachers in the early years are promoting ambitious vocabulary for the children to use. Children use the words 'prediction' and 'medium' when they sort and weigh in mathematics.

Leaders are monitoring the impact of the use of the pupil premium funding more closely than previously. They have responded well to the recommendations of the pupil premium review which took place in March 2017. There is now a detailed provision map showing all the intervention programmes in place to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils, both academically and for their social and emotional development. Leaders have measured the impact of the intervention groups through checking pupils' progress. They know which interventions were more successful than others. For example, the phonics interventions were very successful, resulting in more disadvantaged pupils passing the screening check in Year 1 than previously. However, leaders recognise that the baseline assessments used to judge pupils' social and emotional progress were not detailed enough to enable them to measure progress accurately. They have now rectified the assessments, but it is too soon to judge pupils' progress this term.

Leaders have not checked the quality of teaching in the intervention programmes rigorously enough to recommend how it can be improved. Disadvantaged pupils' outcomes remain as inconsistent as that of other pupils through the school. Although a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieved the higher level at the end of key stage 1 in writing and mathematics in 2017, no disadvantaged pupil achieved highly in these subjects at the end of key stage 2 in 2017.

Pupils' attendance has started to improve. It rose gradually after the inspection up to the end of the summer term, but has risen more rapidly from September. However, it is still below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent did increase in the last academic year, but has fallen in the current year. The headteacher and the attendance officer are monitoring attendance closely and meeting families and outside agencies to discuss barriers to good attendance. This is starting to have a positive impact.

Pupils' behaviour is improving. The behaviour policy is implemented consistently and pupils have a good understanding of the rewards and sanctions system. Leaders carry out regular learning walks around school to check if low-level disruption is reducing learning time. The school's records of behaviour show that, over time, low-level disruption is reducing, including for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders monitor the number of yellow or red cards issued for poor behaviour and look at the reasons

why. Pupils enjoy the 'ever green' assemblies, which reward those pupils whose behaviour is consistently positive. During this visit, no low-level disruption was observed. However, not all pupils have developed the skills to be a resilient learner. If the work is challenging, some pupils started to lose focus and stop trying. Their progress slows.

Pupils' cultural development is improving. Following the inspection, leaders ensured that pupils visited different places of worship or received a visitor whose religion is different to that of their own. Through surveys of pupils' views, leaders could see that this work positively increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of different faiths.

The pupils' spirituality is also being developed well. In assemblies, pupils are asked to reflect on British values, such as respect. Pupils' imagination is also being developed well. In one task, pupils were asked to describe what life would be like if children ruled the world. One pupil wrote, 'It would be mayhem. But the best things are!'

Members of the local governing body and the trustees are checking more closely on the improvements being made at the school. They compare the school's performance to the national averages. They questioned why the end of key stage 2 results were so low compared to the targets set in 2017. School leaders, the chief executive officer and directors of the trust, have reflected hard on this. They have ensured that the assessments of pupils' work are moderated with other schools to ensure that they are more accurate. However, scrutiny of pupils' work still shows some inconsistencies in teachers' assessments, particularly in Years 5 and 6. Too often still, assessments of the standards of pupils' work state that it is higher than the evidence from the work in their books indicates.

Trustees are checking the progress of disadvantaged pupils more closely. They are aware of the interventions to support these pupils and of how successful they are. The trust recognises that more work is needed to improve the overall quality of teaching. The trust's director of teaching is monitoring its quality, and the trust has recently appointed a teaching and learning lead practitioner to further develop their capacity to improve this aspect. The trust used a consultant from the Nottingham City local authority to audit the quality of mathematics teaching throughout the school in June, and to deliver training in September 2017. The impact of this work has been positive. More teaching is pitched at the right level to meet pupils' needs. However, leaders recognise that more work is still required to improve teaching, particularly in key stage 2, in order to improve pupils' outcomes.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school should take further action to:

- improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics to develop pupils' ability to reason mathematically, particularly for the most able pupils
- monitor the quality of teaching for mathematics and for intervention groups, to check where they can be improved to accelerate pupils' progress
- ensure that teachers' assessments accurately reflect pupils' standards of work.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Finch

Her Majesty's Inspector