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Sue Birch
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Birch

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birk Hill Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 10 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 May 2017. 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 early years leader, members of the governing body, and with leaders responsible for assessment, the early years, and key stage 1, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I met also with a representative of the local authority. I visited all classrooms to observe the pupils working and discussed with them what they were doing. I looked at examples of their work during those visits and scrutinised another sample with you separately. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I looked also at a range of other documents, including safeguarding records.

Context

Since the inspection, an assistant headteacher has left the school.

Main findings

The senior leaders and the governing body have responded swiftly and purposefully to the outcome from the inspection in May. Together, you exude a 'let's-get-on-with-it' attitude and are focused sharply on developing practical solutions for the areas for improvement identified by the inspection. The initial impact of the various changes that you have made is apparent in the classrooms and in the pupils' work. This demonstrates that the staff are responding positively to the challenge of improving the school.

The staff are putting into practice the changes that you have introduced in how the pupils' work and progress are assessed. You have arranged meetings at which the staff discuss examples of the pupils' work, so that they get a better sense of what the work shows about how well the pupils have learned. The staff identify much more frequently and accurately pupils' mistakes and misunderstandings than at the time of the previous inspection.

The pupils now respond routinely to what the staff tell them about their work. They correct errors, practise skills with which they have had difficulty, and work on new challenges set by the staff.

Most of the work set for the pupils has a clear learning intention. The pupils with whom I spoke understood what they had to do and could explain how they were to go about it in order to be successful. The lessons that I saw were busy and productive. The pupils were paying attention to and taking care with their work.

The staff have raised their expectations of what the pupils can do. I saw clear examples of that with respect to the presentation of the pupils' work, in tackling the clarity of the pupils' handwriting, and in the way that mathematics problems were set out.

The staff actively look for opportunities to extend the pupils' learning. For example, they ask questions in lessons to get the pupils thinking and then ask further questions to make the pupils think more. You and the senior leaders know that the expectations have not risen universally as much as is needed. For example, some variations are still apparent in the quality and degree of challenge set by the staff, particularly regarding what the pupils should do next.

The early years leader has rapidly introduced well-conceived ways of working, focused unequivocally on what specifically the children are learning. Each review that the staff do of a child's learning records precisely what learning the child has demonstrated and what exactly the child needs to do next. The ways of working are rooted securely in the statutory requirements for the early years. That, in conjunction with the practical

approaches to assessing the children's progress, has clarified for the staff their roles and responsibilities and raised their expectations of the children. In addition, the changed ways of working have brought good opportunities for better involvement of parents in their children's learning, to which many have responded well.

The senior leaders and the governing body demonstrate greater urgency in improving the school than was evident at the time of the last inspection. The external review of governance was completed promptly. The governing body is using the results of the review well to improve its ways of working, though it is still at an early stage of doing so.

The school's improvement plan sets out clearly the school's intentions for dealing with the areas for improvement from the inspection. It is less clear about who exactly is responsible for seeing that each action is completed, when proposed activities will finish, and how the impact of the changes will be measured.

Both the senior leaders and the governing body have increased the frequency and improved the effectiveness of the checks that each carries out on the work of the school, on the progress of the pupils, and on the ways in which the school supports the pupils' welfare. The contribution of subject leaders to improving the pupils' progress remains underdeveloped.

You, the senior leaders and the governing body are candid and accurate in your account of the progress made by the school so far. The school has made a good start to dealing with the areas for improvement from the inspection, but the work is not completed.

External support

You and the senior leaders have shown initiative in identifying and arranging suitable sources of support for the school. You and the governing body have, correctly, identified the need for the school to be outward looking, if it is to improve rapidly, and have set about making it so with vigour. You have established useful links with other, outstanding, schools. You are working well with and supported effectively by the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector