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Ms Nicola Nelson
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Ms Nelson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Radcliffe Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the academy trust 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.

The school should take further action to:

- sharpen leaders' plans for improving the school to identify the impact of actions precisely, including for disadvantaged pupils
- review the quality of teaching in reading and phonics in key stage 1 to identify more precisely what is working well and where further attention is required.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and three staff. I met with the chair of the board of the academy trust and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I looked

through a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plan. With you, I toured the school to observe pupils at work.

Context

Since the inspection in 2016, there have been several changes of staff. Six staff have left the school and three new teachers have taken up post. One newly appointed teacher is an assistant headteacher with responsibility for the early years. Several existing teachers have moved year groups and/or key stage. Two new governors have joined the governing body. The headteacher is currently absent from school. As director of education for Bury College Education Trust, you assumed the role of acting headteacher for the school in October 2017.

Main findings

Radcliffe Primary School continues to improve. Staff and leaders do not disagree with the inspection judgement of November 2016. Instead, they are steadily addressing issues in the school. Staff, leaders, governors and members of the board of the academy trust are determined to work together to raise the quality of education for pupils. Improvements, which started after inspectors judged the predecessor school to be inadequate, have started to accelerate during this past year. Actions are beginning to make a positive difference to the quality of management, teaching and pupils' outcomes. Leaders' chosen ways of working and the gains made are certainly what the school needs. Even so, you still have much to do. All of those responsible for the school know that attainment needs to rise even more and that all pupils need to make good progress.

Staff's teaching and pupils' learning are becoming much more successful. Staff are developing much more confidence and skill in their work. This is because they have frequent opportunities to discuss their work with leaders and external consultants. They benefit from the feedback they receive. They are gaining inspiration from their visits to see the work of colleagues in good and outstanding schools. They are committed to applying new ideas to their work and to meeting the expectations set for them by the headteacher.

Staff and leaders have introduced and developed a new curriculum in the school. Activities they plan for pupils are much more interesting than in the past. This gives pupils and teachers much more enjoyment in lessons, for example when learning about the achievements of the astronaut Tim Peake. The topics selected are beginning to introduce pupils to the diverse modern world in which they live.

Pupils' learning in mathematics is becoming more successful. Teachers give much more attention to setting activities that will challenge pupils to deepen their skills and knowledge. Staff help pupils to practise their multiplication tables regularly. This is making mathematics much more fun. Pupils' speed of recall of key multiplication facts is improving quickly.

Leaders have spent money wisely to invest in many more high-quality fiction books for pupils in key stage 2. An innovative focus on the '75 books to read by the time you leave Year 6' has started to excite pupils and staff about the wonders of children's literature. Pupils and staff discuss books that inspire, thrill and puzzle them and their families.

Staff give careful attention to refining pupils' abilities to understand grammar, punctuation and spelling. This is improving the quality of pupils' learning. In Year 6 in 2017, this lifted pupils' attainment to above the national average. Leaders know they need to do even more to make sure that current pupils use these skills fully in their wider work.

The culture of the school is becoming much more positive and helpful to pupils. Leaders and staff focus closely on the values they believe are central to pupils' success at Radcliffe. Staff promote high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour clearly in lessons, assemblies and extra-curricular activities. Staff celebrate pupils' good work very positively in attractive displays throughout corridors and classrooms. The school's new approach to promoting good behaviour is paying dividends. Staff's and leaders' new emphasis is positive, easy to remember for pupils and understood well. Pupils focus on the quality of their work much more because they are calmer and more sensible. Staff and leaders are not complacent. They say that more attention is needed by staff to sustain recent improvements in pupils' behaviour.

The headteacher, with the support of the academy trust and the governing body, is developing the roles and skills of the leadership team. Expectations of individual leaders are now much higher than in the past. Leaders have access to much more support and training for their roles. Leaders have more opportunities to review, plan and continue to make improvements.

The trust board and the governing body are starting to meet with the wider leadership team more frequently. Together they now discuss the work of the school in more detail. As a result, leaders have an increasingly clear understanding of the actions and activities they are undertaking to improve the school. Even so, we discussed during the visit that it is necessary to review the school's work in key stage 1 more extensively. For example, you want to understand why pupils' outcomes in phonics in Year 1 are not yet improving. You told me that you want leaders to be even clearer about what changes they are making to teaching, learning and assessment in this year group.

An external review of governance was carried out promptly following the previous inspection. The review is a model of good practice. It is detailed, precise and thorough. The trust board has set an ambitious and wide-ranging action plan to improve its own work and that of the governing body. Each action is reviewed carefully. Both the trust board and the school governing body are clear about their specific roles and how they are helping the school on its journey to become good.

New members of the governing body have expertise that adds to the skills and abilities of existing governors. The governing body and the trust board are starting to review teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes much more carefully.

Staff, leaders, governors and members of the trust board are clear and accurate in their analysis that pupils have much ground to make up in their learning. Pupils struggle to fulfil their potential because of past weaknesses in teaching, the curriculum and pupils' poor behaviour. These crucial issues are being increasingly addressed by staff and leaders. For that reason, pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics in key stage 1 and key stage 2 is rising. However, overall attainment remains below the national average and pupils' progress was poor by the end of Year 6 in both 2016 and 2017. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is broadly average. Even so, leaders are starting to give a sharper focus to the learning of disadvantaged pupils, so that their achievement improves even further.

In the early years, the proportion of children gaining a good level of development has declined further. Recent changes in staffing and leadership have now set the early years on a path of improvement since spring 2017.

Leaders' plans for improvement are appropriate. Planned actions suit the needs of the school and link well with the recommendations made at the previous inspection. However, information needs to be even more precise to show how leaders will measure success, including for disadvantaged pupils.

External support

Externally commissioned support has helped individual teachers and leaders to sharpen the focus of their work and enhance their skills. A visit from representatives of the Department for Education (after previous visits in 2016 and 2015) assisted school leaders to identify additional priorities for improvement. Since January 2017, the new director of education of the trust has given additional challenge and support to the school, including arranging links with other schools. The trust board has recently decided to stop using wider external support and draw more upon the expertise of its trust director of education. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this decision.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
Her Majesty's Inspector