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Miss Vanessa Carr
Falla Park Community Primary School
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Dear Miss Carr

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Falla Park Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 January 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- targets set for improving pupils' outcomes, including the most able and most able disadvantaged pupils, are sharp and measurable so that governors can keep a more precise check on the effect of leaders' work
- all governors play a full role in challenging and supporting the school and attend meetings regularly.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, a group of middle leaders, the chair of the governing body, two other governors and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also conducted a telephone discussion with the local authority school improvement service director. The school development plan was reviewed, alongside leaders' summary evaluation of the performance of the school. You and I conducted visits to a number of classrooms. I looked at the work in a sample of pupils' workbooks to check on progress and talked informally to some pupils about their learning. I also met with a group of teaching and non-teaching staff. A range of other documentation was reviewed, including records of the checks on teachers' performance, minutes of governing body meetings, records of meetings of the local authority steering group, information on the school's website and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Context

Since the previous inspection, a number of internal appointments have been made by the governing body. The deputy headteacher took up her post in June 2017. The leader for assessment assumed the role of upper key stage 2 leader in September 2017. The early years leader also took up post in September 2017.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you and the newly formed leadership team have worked cohesively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Middle leaders share your vision for the school and are using their skills increasingly well to improve outcomes for pupils, particularly in English and mathematics. Staff report that they have complete confidence in the leadership of the school. They can see the positive impact of the changes you have made since the previous inspection.

The introduction of a new system to keep track of pupils' progress and attainment has ensured that all leaders have a clear picture of the achievement of groups of pupils. This is enabling leaders to invest their energies in the right priorities for improvement. Staff report that they are now much more confident with their assessment of pupils' learning because of the new strategies you have introduced and the more frequent opportunities to check on the accuracy of their judgements. Workbooks show that most teachers are drawing on their knowledge of pupils' prior attainment to ensure that teaching is better matched to the needs of pupils. As a result, most pupils' progress, including that of disadvantaged pupils, is improving across the school.

The quality of teaching in mathematics has improved significantly due to the well-focused improvement work coordinated by the leader for mathematics. Staff have benefited from training and support to develop their subject knowledge. A new

approach to planning for pupils' learning is ensuring that units of work build progressively on their mathematical skills. Teachers are making better use of new practical resources so that pupils gain a concrete understanding of mathematical concepts. Workbooks show that teachers demand, increasingly, that pupils explain their mathematical reasoning. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics has risen across most classes. In 2017, the attainment of pupils in Year 6 rose and was broadly in line with the national average for all pupils at both the expected and higher standards in mathematics.

You and the leader for English have taken swift action to address weaknesses in the teaching of reading. Pupils are thrilled by the new, meatier texts they now experience in their lessons, which are matched more closely to their reading ability. More pupils are now reading regularly in school and at home. Staff have received training on guided reading sessions and this has been complemented by a refreshed approach to the teaching of phonics. Consequently, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check in Year 1 has risen and more pupils are beginning to make faster progress in reading to reach the expected standard for their age. You recognise that there is still more to do to ensure that progress and attainment continue to rise in reading so that they are in line with national averages, including for the most able pupils.

Since the previous inspection, the leadership team has steadily improved the quality of teaching. Clear, accurate feedback from leaders has ensured that most teachers make good use of the teaching time available and have high expectations of the quality of work that pupils produce. In most classes, teaching is now securing better progress from pupils. Leaders are well aware of the remaining weaknesses in teaching and are taking appropriate action to address them.

Following the previous inspection, a review of pupil premium spending was commissioned promptly through the local authority. This has been helpful in identifying important aspects of the school's work which needed to be improved. Leaders now have a clearer picture of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils and a senior leader has been assigned to oversee the school's work in this area. The school's approach to helping pupils to catch up in aspects of English and mathematics has been overhauled. You now only invest funding in programmes of support which are rooted in sound research so that you can be certain about their effectiveness. This work, along with your actions to improve the quality of teaching generally, has resulted in an increased proportion of disadvantaged pupils making stronger progress to catch up and reach the standards expected for their age. You know that you now need to focus on ensuring that the most able disadvantaged pupils make more rapid progress to reach the highest standards of attainment.

Staff have made a number of changes to improve the learning environment accessed by children in the early years. There is a wide range of resources available for children to make choices about their play. In the Nursery, children were keen to

use chalks and blackboards to record their success in a ball game. This enabled them to write for a specific purpose. While outcomes for children at the end of the Reception Year are improving, the teaching of the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics requires further development. Too often, activities do not demand enough of children, lack purpose or do not take account of what children can already do. Current approaches to teaching children to form their letters accurately are not proving to be sufficiently effective. You are aware of the work that still needs to be done to improve progress across the early years and are accessing external support to help you with this.

Governors know the school well. They are realistic about what has improved and what still needs to be done. They are strongly aware of balancing the need for rapid improvement in the school with their duty of care to staff. They have made good use of a staff questionnaire to assess the impact of leaders' actions. Governors receive detailed information about the school's performance. They recognise, however, that targets set for improving pupils' outcomes, particularly the most able, need to be measurable so that they can keep a more precise check on the progress being made.

While some governors are making a strong contribution to the school, minutes of meetings and information on the school's website reflect that some governors' attendance at meetings is variable. The chair of the governing body acknowledges that this is an issue which needs to be tackled to ensure that all governors play a full role in challenging and supporting the school to improve.

External support

You and the chair of the governing body are full of praise for the support you have received from the local authority and the positive difference it has made to the school. The steering group, led by the local authority, has kept a strategic check on the school's work, providing effective challenge and coordinating support. Subject-specific training and consultancy have made a strong contribution to improving the skills of middle leaders and the quality of teaching in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown
Her Majesty's Inspector