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Dear Mr Appleton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cherry Tree Hill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Thursday 15 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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 good.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and the deputy headteacher. I met with other senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. We visited a number of lessons together and I spoke with a group of pupils. Examples of pupils' work were scrutinised with the leaders for English and mathematics. The school improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been several staff changes. Fifteen teachers and teaching assistants have left the school, and new appointments to fill these positions have been made. New staff have also been employed to accommodate the growing number of pupils attending the school.

Main findings

Your drive and determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school are clear. You have taken swift and effective action to tackle the areas of priority. Your plans to improve the school are sharply focused and are securing rapid improvements. You work closely with the deputy headteacher and the governing body to regularly review and accurately revise these plans, to ensure that the school continues to improve.

You have successfully addressed weaker teaching. To tackle areas in need of development, you used a combination of good external support, skilled peer coaching and close checks on teachers' assessment of pupils' work.

You have taken decisive action to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics across the school. Leaders for mathematics have accessed high-quality training to improve teaching strategies and raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. From my scrutiny of pupils' books, I could see that pupils across the school are now achieving well in mathematics. Pupils receive frequent opportunities to solve problems to deepen their understanding and are encouraged to explain their understanding verbally, as well as in written form. Pupils, including the most able pupils, said that they enjoy their learning in mathematics lessons. They said that they feel challenged because 'We have harder problems to solve and it makes us think more when we have to explain how we worked them out.'

The restructuring of the leadership team has been effective. You accessed good-quality training to develop leaders' expertise so they can better support improvements. It was clear during discussions with leaders that they are knowledgeable about their roles and have clear plans for continued improvements to the quality of teaching. For example, senior leaders sourced specific, research-based training and specialist support for middle leaders to develop teaching and learning. This has enabled middle leaders to train and support staff in more effective approaches to teaching. As a result, teachers plan work that is well matched to different pupils' abilities.

Leaders ensure that teachers address pupils' misconceptions in learning promptly in lessons. Leaders' introduction of a consistent approach to ongoing assessment has helped teachers to quickly identify pupils who need extra support during a lesson. Teachers are able to then put in place prompt, specific additional teaching, often on the same day, to enable pupils to catch up quickly.

Since the previous inspection, you have carefully analysed pupils' prior attainment, and reviewed the frequency and reliability of current assessments. You ensure that leaders rigorously check the impact of their actions on improving outcomes for pupils. Leaders use a range of evidence from these checks to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and to plan next steps for teachers and pupils. As a result, the majority of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.

There was clear evidence during the inspection that pupils read and write for different purposes and across a range of subjects. Teachers ensure that pupils have frequent opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in different subjects, such as science. Teachers also plan themed days and weeks when pupils can use their mathematical understanding in real-life situations. For example, as part of an enterprise week, pupils used their mathematical skills to help them design, make and sell their own products.

You are improving the quality of teaching and learning in reading and writing by raising the profile of reading across the school. Leaders for English have rejuvenated the library to make it more accessible for pupils and provide books that appeal more to a wider range of pupils. Time is now planned into the school day for pupils to access the library to read for pleasure. Following specialist advice, leaders restructured the teaching of reading. For example, teachers now teach reading earlier in the day and plan lessons that are based on good-quality texts. High priority is placed on developing pupils' verbal and written vocabulary.

Increasingly, teachers are planning challenging tasks to extend and deepen pupils' understanding of the texts they read. These include pupils' written responses to questions, as well as extended written work based on their reading and understanding of the texts. In addition, teachers in the early years and key stage 1 classes teach specific phonics skills twice a day. This is rapidly improving pupils' reading and spelling skills. As a result, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was well above the national average, in 2017.

From my scrutiny of pupils' writing, I could see that pupils are frequently challenged to write at length and independently. Leaders are developing pupils' understanding of spelling, grammar and punctuation well, and teachers have increasingly high expectations for pupils' handwriting. Nevertheless, the leaders for English are determined to further improve the standard of pupils' writing and have plans in place to ensure that, in particular, the most able pupils are challenged to make even better progress.

Attendance is improving. You have allocated one of the assistant headteachers to carefully check on pupils' regular attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities,

improved last year, is better than national averages so far this year and is rigorously monitored.

External support

You and the deputy headteacher highly value the effective support and challenge the school has received from the local authority to develop leadership skills and secure sustainable improvement planning.

Senior leaders have accessed good-quality support from the Primary Strategy Group, which brokered the Transform Trust to provide effective training and guidance to middle leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The leaders for mathematics also received specific training and gained access to good-quality resources through the East Midlands Maths Hub. The Strategic School Improvement Fund was used to improve the teaching of reading through brokering advice and training from the Landau Teaching School Alliance, Harrington Nursery and the Derby Teaching School's Alliance.

The support has been effective in enabling school leaders to take action in the areas identified as needing improvement. Middle leaders feel empowered. They greatly appreciate the opportunities and time given for them to develop their practice. Consequently, they have been able to swiftly improve teaching and learning and secure high-quality provision for pupils.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Innes-Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector