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Mrs Margaret Liddle
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Liddle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Larkspur Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 March 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- rapidly secure good or better teaching and learning in reading and writing across key stages, including the early years
- use assessment information more skilfully to plan challenging tasks and suitable interventions for pupils, particularly the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities
- further enhance the skills and effectiveness of subject leaders, holding them fully accountable for pupils' outcomes across the curriculum and in each key stage.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior and subject leaders, pupils, governors, including the chair of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and subject leaders' action plans were evaluated. I conducted teaching and learning observations jointly with you across key stages and looked at the quality of pupils' work in books and on display. I considered assessment information about current pupils' progress and I scrutinised a range of documents, including the outcomes of leaders' and the local authority's monitoring activities and the impact of performance management.

Context

Since the previous inspection in October 2016, a number of staffing and governance changes have taken place. Three teachers have left and others have returned following leave. Four teaching assistants have left and will not be replaced due to the number of pupils currently on roll. Several governors are new or recently appointed and the chair of governors has additional support in the form of a co-chair of governors. Children in Nursery and Reception are now taught together in an early years unit rather than as two distinct classes.

Main findings

You responded promptly to the recommendations of the previous inspection. Whole-school improvement planning takes due note of the key priorities identified. You have been diligent in tackling these issues. For example, systems to monitor teachers' performance have been tightened. The assessment procedures that you have put in place allow leaders to track pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics more closely, particularly in key stages 1 and 2. You set targets for all pupils, which are more ambitious. You also understand that these need reviewing and updating, in a timely fashion, where appropriate.

As a result of your actions, leaders and teachers now have a wealth of assessment information at their fingertips. Pupils' progress is tracked termly and leaders meet regularly to discuss findings. This said, the vast quantity of information at your fingertips sometimes confuses, rather than simplifies, things for staff. Adults get bogged down in multiple sets of figures and minutiae, rather than identifying precisely what is working well and responding to specific issues. For example, not all teachers use assessment information effectively to plan reading and writing tasks that challenge the most able pupils and/or to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Furthermore, the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities within interventions is too vague. You agree that leaders and teachers need to collate and use assessment information more concisely and skilfully.

The previous inspection challenged you to improve the quality of teaching and

learning in reading and mathematics. You have ensured that all staff, including leaders, have had access to regular, good-quality training in both English and mathematics. You have worked closely with the local authority and other schools to share effective practices and moderate pupils' work. As a result of your actions, you have had measurable success, particularly regarding the teaching and learning of mathematics. The proportion of pupils in key stages 1 and 2 reaching the expected standard in mathematics rose to broadly in line with national averages in 2017. Also, the proportion of pupils in each key stage reaching a greater depth of learning in mathematics has improved over time.

You have raised the profile of reading successfully; pupils say that they enjoy the plentiful supply of new books and reading materials. Each class has an attractive reading area and more time is purposefully set aside for pupils to read. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in phonics is steadily rising. In key stage 2, pupils' outcomes in reading in 2017 were broadly in line with others nationally at the expected standard.

Nonetheless, you have correctly identified that some aspects of reading and writing need closer scrutiny and further development. The quality of teaching and learning in reading and writing remains too variable across key stages. In key stages 1 and 2, not all pupils have enough challenge in their work and learning. The most able children in the early years are not always challenged sufficiently in each area of provision, especially in writing. Not all pupils, therefore, make good or better progress from their different starting points in reading and/or writing.

Despite several obvious successes since the previous inspection, you are not complacent. You rightly feel that the wider curriculum has taken a bit of a back seat with regards to development. Your longer-term improvement plans demonstrate your keen awareness that subject leaders need to be held more accountable for pupils' outcomes in subjects such as science, geography and history. In particular, you have found that some leaders lack confidence in knowing precisely where the learning journey begins. Some leaders do not have a well-developed understanding of the early years curriculum and how it relates to their subject. This hinders leaders' effectiveness in monitoring and leading their subject from children's earliest starting points.

External support

You have embraced external advice and guidance. You have secured several positive links with other providers, both locally and further afield. Teaching staff have benefited from visiting other schools to garner ideas and to share good practice.

The local authority has shown demonstrable support and challenge. English and mathematics advisers have visited regularly, working with staff across the school. Senior leaders, governors and local authority partners meet regularly to discuss the

extent of improvement and to agree next steps. You find these meetings helpful and informative. The early years consultant has also offered some support to the early years team, following the recent changes in staffing in this key stage.

With local authority guidance, you initiated a review of the school's use of pupil premium funding and a review of the governing body, taking swift action against the findings of each.

The pupil premium review made several recommendations. You followed its advice carefully to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across key stages. You have had several successes. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 1 reaching the expected standard in phonics, reading, writing and mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. In key stage 2, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes in mathematics and writing have been sustained broadly in line with other pupils nationally at the expected standard. You recognise, however, that in some areas, differences between disadvantaged pupils and others remain too stark over time. Their attainment in each subject in key stage 1, for example, remains lower than national averages. Also, although improving, disadvantaged pupils' outcomes in reading in key stage 2 remain weak compared to the national average. The most able disadvantaged are not challenged consistently to catch up with their national peers. Furthermore, in the early years, disadvantaged children's outcomes are too variable, particularly in terms of reading and writing.

Governors conducted an audit of their skills to check that they had the requisite knowledge and understanding to manage their duties more successfully. New and recently appointed governors were carefully selected to fill those gaps in skills that were duly identified. Governors have also undertaken a wider range of professional development and training opportunities. They challenge leaders more consistently and get into school regularly to find out for themselves how it feels to be a pupil in the school. Detailed records of governors' visits to school now capture the findings of governors' visits in a consistent manner, which means they inform the wider governing body more helpfully. Your reports to the governing body have finer detail and information about the school's performance against the national picture. Such actions have had a positive effect on governors' confidence and effectiveness.

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

Fiona Manuel

Her Majesty's Inspector