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Miss Helen Stevens
Headteacher
Lynsted and Norton Primary School
Lynsted Lane
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Dear Miss Stevens

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lynsted and Norton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 26 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, governors and The Village Academy Trust 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that new subject leaders are having a positive impact on raising standards and improving teaching across the school
- plan how pupils will develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in a wide range of subjects
- continue to work with families to improve attendance
- ensure that all actions on improvement plans have measurable outcomes.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the academy trust acting academy director (chief executive officer), the academy trust vice-principal, the chair

of the local academy council and two teachers with leadership responsibilities to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

We visited each classroom together to observe pupils learning, and to talk to pupils about their work. I looked at examples of pupils' work over time. I scrutinised school documentation relating to safeguarding, governance, leadership and self-evaluation.

Context

Since the previous inspection there has been a period of great change. The previous headteacher left in December 2016. There were two successive acting headteachers from within the trust before you were appointed as headteacher. Although you took up full-time responsibility for the school in January 2018, you have been working with school leaders from September 2017. The number of pupils on roll has fallen to 92. Six teachers have left the school, some as part of a staffing restructure that saw the number of staff at the school nearly halve.

There have also been changes at trust level. The academy principal (chief executive officer) is currently absent and his role is being covered by the acting academy director. Changes have been made to governance arrangements to clarify the roles of trustees and local boards, which are now known as academy councils.

Main findings

Changes to governance, leadership, staffing and to the number of pupils attending the school have slowed progress in making improvements since the previous inspection. However, the rate of progress has improved recently. Since being employed full time as headteacher, you have articulated your 'high and clear expectations'. Teachers say that they find this is helpful and supportive and that they know exactly what is expected of them. Teaching is improving, especially in the early years. As a result, pupils are making faster progress than previously in reading, writing and mathematics.

You have identified that disadvantaged pupils do not appear to be making as much progress as others in the school. We discussed how a large proportion of disadvantaged pupils also have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and how this may be skewing the assessment information. You have agreed that it will be sensible to check the progress of disadvantaged pupils with and without SEN separately to better understand how well each group is doing.

You have rightly taken a much firmer line with attendance and behaviour. As a result, the proportion of pupils who have 100% attendance each half term is increasing and the number of behaviour incidents is reducing.

At the time of the last inspection, leaders were asked to improve the impact of middle leaders. Many of the current middle leaders are new to their roles this year and are only just beginning to have an impact on improving teaching and standards

throughout the school. You are confident that by the end of the year their actions will have had a demonstrable impact across the school. I am optimistic that this is true because of the positive support they receive from you, the support they receive working with other middle leaders across the trust, and the knowledge and skills they gain from completing external training and qualifications.

The chair of the local academy council is skilled and determined. She knows the school well and is challenging you, other school leaders and the trust to do better for the pupils who attend the school. However, the academy council as a whole is depleted and lacking members. You are adamant that it is a priority to find people to fill these positions who have the right skills, experience and expertise.

Plans for improvement are fit for purpose. They show clearly how the trust will support you in making the necessary improvements to teaching across the school. The plan also clearly shows how members of the academy council will monitor the progress that you are making. However, not all actions have success criteria that are easy to measure. In the early years section it is very clear that you expect the proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development to improve. Conversely, for outcomes in other key stages and in other aspects of the plan, it is much less clear.

You recognise that for the school to be judged good at the next section 5 inspection, pupils need to be making progress in a wide range of subjects. Improvements in English and mathematics are well under way. However, plans in other subjects are still developing. You are determined to design a curriculum that makes effective use of the local community and the interests of pupils. The current action plan for the creative curriculum focuses on teachers' compliance rather than pupils' outcomes. A much greater focus is needed on how pupils will improve their knowledge, understanding and skills in a wide range of subjects.

External support

The Village Academy Trust is going through a period of change. The acting academy director has reinvigorated and reinvented the direction of the trust and the systems of governance and accountability within it. This has come at a very helpful time when it comes to improving Lynsted and Norton Primary School under your leadership.

There are now clearer lines of accountability between the trust, academy council and school leaders than previously. These systems will increasingly benefit pupils as the local governance roles are filled with appropriate members.

Work across the academy trust between groups of staff is greatly enhancing the professional development of your staff and also enabling them to moderate their assessment judgements accurately.

You personally benefit from the expertise of the academy vice-principal and the ability to work with other trust headteachers. This support is vital as you work diligently and determinedly to ensure that the school continues to improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of The Village Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector