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Mrs Jayne Mercer
Headteacher
Fairfield Endowed CofE (C) Junior School
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Dear Mrs Mercer

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Fairfield Endowed CofE (C) Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 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.

The school should take further action to:

- enable pupils to demonstrate the new skills they are learning through sufficient opportunities to reason mathematically and to write at length in different subjects
- ensure that the school development plan includes details of who will undertake each action and precisely how and when its success will be measured
- make sure that the development plan contains clear actions to improve pupils' understanding of the diversity of life in modern Britain.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, the deputy headteacher, the family liaison worker and the coordinator for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I met with representatives of the governing body. I held a meeting with a representative from the local authority and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese. I evaluated the leaders' improvement planning and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. I also met with a large group of pupils and toured the school with you to see lessons taking place in all classes. I checked that the school's records of safeguarding checks meets requirements.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing, governance or the school's status since the previous inspection.

Main findings

You and senior leaders are determined for the school to be a good one as quickly as possible and are working tirelessly to make this happen. There is a clear sense of positivity among the school community. Pupils whom I met during my inspection were keen to tell me about their lessons, how teachers are giving them challenging work and how much they are learning. Parents and carers who responded to the school's recent questionnaire expressed positive views of your leadership and about the quality of teaching. Senior and middle leaders whom I spoke to were able to describe to me the changes that are taking place as they help you to improve the quality of teaching and, as a result, assist pupils to learn more quickly.

Teachers' planning shows that teachers across the school are examining pupils' work more closely, and the answers pupils give them in class, to make accurate judgements about what pupils know and can do. They are then using this information to identify the most important things for each pupil to learn next. You have introduced a new policy for feedback which is being consistently applied in all classes and that pupils are familiar with. Pupils whom I met told me how teachers will explain to them what they need to work on, such as their nine times table, and that they find this helpful. Pupils also take part themselves in the process of considering what they do not know yet. They are looking at their own work or that of their peers and helping to identify particular aspects they need more practice in. Unlike at the time of the previous inspection, there are few examples of pupils being made to repeat work unnecessarily. Pupils' work that I scrutinised during my visit shows that pupils are increasingly being moved on to learn new things quickly.

Teachers' planning also shows that they are providing pupils with more opportunities to extend their thinking and deepen their learning. Teachers' planning includes teaching pupils how to, for instance, make inferences from texts such as a character's thoughts, feelings and motives. These new opportunities are not confined to English and mathematics. For example, pupils in Year 3 recently made

Celtic roundhouses by estimating, cutting and glueing materials together. Pupils were required to think carefully and identify those things they could do independently and which skills they needed help with, such as the size of the doorways. Pupils were also asked to consider the knowledge and skills they had learned from completing their task. Pupils' exercise books that I saw showed that they could express themselves appropriately.

You continually monitor the quality of teaching by visiting classrooms, and your staff are left in no doubt of your clear expectations that those pupils who need to catch up must do so. You are ensuring that the school's system for managing staff performance gives teachers clear targets for the proportions of pupils you expect to be performing at least as expected for their age. This appraisal system also takes into account, where relevant, pupils who have the potential to attain greater depth of understanding by the end of the academic year.

Teachers are challenging the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, more effectively in their learning. This is helping these pupils to achieve higher standards in relation to the expectations for their age. For example, pupils in Year 6 were learning how to generate and describe linear number sequences to write formulae for the 'nth' term in a sequence and to understand why $2(p+2) = 2p+4$. Pupils I met explained to me how their teachers consistently give work that is more difficult to the higher-attaining pupils, but also to other pupils whom teachers judge will benefit from a particular task with even greater challenge.

Those pupils who enter the school with phonics skills that are weaker than their peers are being given help to catch up. Leaders have ensured that the staff who teach pupils in Year 3 have been trained well so that they can support these pupils to improve. School data shows that a very large majority these pupils are making good gains in their phonics knowledge. You and staff know the skills of each pupil precisely and you are ensuring that pupils continue to receive help to address the gaps in their learning.

Although pupils are making faster overall progress, and their attainment is rising, they do not yet have sufficient opportunities to practise the new skills that they are learning. The mathematics subject leader has identified correctly that, although pupils' skills in arithmetic are now considerably more secure in all year groups, teachers do not plan enough activities for pupils to explain their thinking mathematically. Pupils' exercise books also show that, across all year groups, teachers do not require pupils to write enough. This limits pupils' opportunities, for example, to use ambitious vocabulary, demonstrate their secure phonics skills or show how they can use paragraphs or tenses correctly.

You are providing the governing body with better information so that you and they can check and evaluate together the impact on pupils' progress of the strategies to improve teaching and learning. You are giving them good information on the new initiatives that you have introduced and how these are helping to drive up the quality of teaching. For instance, governors explained to me how you and your staff have met with their colleagues from Fairfield Infant School. Governors understand

how these visits have been useful because they have given staff a greater understanding of the expectations of their colleagues and how they assess pupils in their school. This, in turn, has helped them know what to plan to teach pupils when they join your school. You and subject leaders are also providing the governing body with data regarding pupils' achievement. This is helping them to ask you questions about, for example, why in some year groups a greater proportion of pupils attain the expectations for their age compared to others. You are also keeping governors informed so that they can be reassured that disadvantaged pupils are making as much progress as they can so that any of these pupils who need to catch up can do so.

The school improvement plan sets out a set of sensible actions against most of the areas for improvement. However, the plan is not highly effective. This is because it does not consistently make clear who will be responsible for actions taking place, nor by what criteria these actions will be judged to measure their success. In addition, it does not explain when their effectiveness will be monitored. This risks the actions being missed or delayed or not having the impact that you intend. You have rightly made improving the overall quality of teaching your most important priority. You are seeing a rise in pupils' progress, and higher standards, as a result. However, in taking this decision, you have purposely delayed until now planning actions to help pupils develop a better understanding of the diversity of life in modern Britain. You agree that the school's development plan now needs to be adapted so that you draw up and implement changes to the curriculum in this respect.

External support

Leaders have worked closely with the diocesan board. The representative from the board visits you regularly and has assisted you with observing the quality of teaching and to moderate your judgements. He has also given new members of the governing body valuable support on understanding pupils' performance data. The representative from the local authority has assisted subject leaders to check the quality of their monitoring and to examine school data to ensure that pupils' achievement is improving. The work scrutiny she has completed with leaders has correctly identified things that leaders need to improve next. An executive headteacher from the Ashbourne and Dove Valley Teaching School Alliance has provided leaders with support for the formative assessment of pupils in mathematics, as well as observing the quality of teaching with you and its impact on pupils' learning as seen in their exercise books.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector