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Mr Nigel Oram
Harper Bell Seventh-day Adventist School
29 Ravenhurst Street
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Dear Mr Oram

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harper Bell Seventh-day Adventist School

Following my visit to your school on 20 September 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, other leaders and four members of the interim executive board. I met informally with parents at the start of the day and with a group of key stage 2 pupils. I also met with an education consultant who is providing support as an improvement partner. Additionally, I spoke to a representative of the organisation providing support commissioned by the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plan was evaluated. A learning walk was carried out with you, and I looked at pupils' work.

I scrutinised a range of documents, including middle leaders' action plans, the

outcome of monitoring activities and assessment information.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been some changes in teaching staff. In September 2017, a leader with responsibility for the early years was appointed. A new class teacher was also appointed and in January 2018 he became the leader with responsibility for mathematics. A new leader of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities took up the post in September 2018. The school is no longer subject to an order to become an academy. There are firm plans in place for the school to retain its status as a voluntary-aided school and to constitute a new governing body to replace the interim executive body.

Main findings

You and your deputy headteacher demonstrate an unwavering determination to bring about improvement. You and other leaders work hard to ensure that the school is making rapid progress towards becoming good at the next inspection. All staff know and understand the improvement priorities because these priorities are clear and they focus on improving the quality of teaching to improve pupils' outcomes. You motivate the staff team and they respond well to your high expectations of what they can achieve. The parents I spoke to at the start of the inspection are very positive about the improvements that they have seen since the inspection in March 2017. They hold you and your deputy in high regard.

The school improvement plan is organised into the key priorities for improvement. You ensure that there are clear actions with measurable targets. This means that the members of the interim executive board can monitor the impact of what is being done and identify any further action that needs to be taken. While the plan includes the areas for improvement from the last inspection, it also details the wider priorities for the school. For example, you have plans to further develop the curriculum so that pupils gain a full and deep understanding of the topics they study.

Leaders carry out lesson observations each half term. In addition, they scrutinise pupils' work and hold meetings with teachers about the progress that pupils make. Leaders provide teachers with detailed feedback which identifies strengths and areas to improve. Leaders also ensure that teachers receive individual support to improve their practice. As a result of this highly focused coaching, there have been considerable improvements in the overall quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have taken swift action to improve teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics. You have revised the curriculum to reflect what pupils in key stage 1 and key stage 2 should be learning in mathematics.

In addition to this, a new calculations policy has been put into place which clarifies

exactly how pupils should develop these skills. Mathematics lessons have a structure that provides daily opportunities for pupils to practise and refine calculation skills and to solve mathematical problems. Teachers encourage pupils to explain what they have done and why a calculation is correct. As a result, pupils are developing good mathematical reasoning skills.

In key stage 2, the most able pupils are challenged effectively because teachers plan tasks that build on what they already know and can do. Some teachers are expert at spotting when pupils have misunderstood what is being taught or when misconceptions occur. These teachers provide clear explanations and model the concept they are teaching so that pupils know exactly what to do. As a result, most pupils are making strong progress and outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have significantly improved. In 2018, pupils' attainment in mathematics was above the national average at the expected standard. However, sometimes teachers do not identify quickly enough when pupils in the class do not fully understand what they need to do. As a result, learning time is wasted, which limits the progress that these pupils make.

Teaching of mathematics in key stage 1 has strengthened but is still not consistently good. Teachers do not make the best use of their knowledge of what pupils can do and, on occasion, expectations are too low. There was a decline in outcomes for pupils in 2018 compared with the previous year. The proportion achieving the expected standard in 2018 was below the national average. Some pupils across key stage 1 have not made the progress of which they are capable due to the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In addition to this, pupils have left and joined the school during this time, affecting their performance at the end of the academic year.

Significant improvements have been made to the early years provision. Children get off to a good start at Harper Bell, where they make strong progress. In 2018, the proportion of children who achieved the good level of development was above the national average. In the lesson we observed, children were highly engaged in learning about numbers. Adults modelled the activity clearly. As a result, children knew exactly what they had to do. Adults encourage pupils to use mathematical vocabulary, and some of the most able children can explain their answers very well. Adults plan activities using practical resources that encourage children to explore and find things out for themselves. Adults ensure that activities provide challenge for all children, including the most able.

The outdoor area is an extension of the indoor learning environment and children move easily between the two spaces. Resources are stimulating and promote investigation and creativity. For example, children have access to magnifying glasses to take a closer look at seeds that are starting to grow. Role play areas encourage children to practise their speaking and listening skills, and there are opportunities for children to write, paint and draw. Children are also able to develop

their physical skills using the larger equipment available.

Adults carry out baseline assessments so that they know what children can already do. Adults also take the time to find out what children's interests are so that they can weave these into the topics. Each child has a book in which parents can add information about what they have been doing at home. Adults consider this information when planning the next steps for children. The early years leader ensures that additional adults are used effectively to support learning in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, there is time set aside each day to provide extra support for children who have struggled to grasp a concept.

A permanent early years leader took up the post in September 2017. You have ensured that she has been supported to develop the leadership skills needed to bring about rapid improvement of the early years provision. She evaluates the strengths and further areas for improvement accurately. In addition, she uses her knowledge of child development and how children learn best to create an action plan that builds on what has already been achieved.

You ensure that the leader of mathematics is well supported to be an effective subject leader. He has an accurate overview of the quality of teaching in mathematics throughout the school. He uses this to provide further training or guidance for teachers. The mathematics leader and the early years leader provide considerable support to the senior leadership team in driving school improvement. You know that work remains to develop other subject leaders and the leadership of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

External support

Leaders make effective use of a range of external support. The local authority has commissioned support through Birmingham Education Partnership, who have brokered support from the Birmingham nursery schools teaching schools alliance. Subject leaders benefit from bespoke development plans, which have had a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. The interim executive board employ an education consultant, who works with senior leaders. The focus of this support is on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. In addition, support is linked to wider school improvement priorities identified following the termly reviews of teaching and learning.

I am copying this letter to the executive board, the regional school's commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jo Evans
Her Majesty's Inspector