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20 November 2018

Mrs Annette Lupton
Whaley Thorns Primary School
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Dear Mrs Lupton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whaley Thorns Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 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.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2017, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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 met with you, the deputy headteacher, three middle leaders and two other members of staff. I met with four governors, including the chair. I held discussions with a representative from the local authority and the headteacher of Stubbin Wood School, who has been providing additional support to the school. Together, you and I visited the nurture group and every class to see the learning that was taking place. I spoke informally with pupils in class and more formally with

a group of six pupils. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and I read a letter given to me by a parent. Together you and I looked at a range of pupils' books from across the school. I examined the minutes from recent governors' meetings and the school's improvement plan. I scrutinised the single central record of vetting checks.

Context

The previous headteacher left her post in December 2017. You took up your post as acting headteacher in January 2018. You were appointed as substantive headteacher in April 2018. Since that time, one teacher has left. Another teacher who has been on long-term sick leave will be leaving the school shortly. One teacher who had been on a temporary contract has taken up a permanent post. The deputy headteacher will be leaving the school at Easter 2019. You have reorganised the classes. One class is currently being taught by two supply teachers and an additional teacher has been appointed to create smaller classes in upper key stage 2.

When you were appointed in January 2018, the chair of governors was the only remaining member of the governing body. There is now a full complement of governors.

Main findings

You have established a new system to enable teachers to assess the progress that pupils are making. You have provided teachers with training to be able to make accurate assessments and to use the information to plan pupils' next steps in learning. They have worked alongside colleagues, both in this school and in other local schools, to check the accuracy of their assessments. Leaders have introduced a new strategy for the teaching of writing. The strategy allows teachers to check pupils' knowledge and skills, and to use the information this provides to teach new skills and concepts. During our tour of lessons, we saw that teachers are beginning to use the information that the assessments provide to plan work that challenges pupils and builds on what they already know and can do. However, this is not yet consistently applied across the school. On occasion, the work that teachers provide for pupils is just too easy for them. Our scrutiny of writing in pupils' books confirmed that while some teachers are ensuring that pupils improve their writing, there remains some variability in how well the school's new strategy is being implemented.

Leaders have introduced a clear approach to teaching reading across the school. Pupils told me that they enjoy the new approach and that they read more often at school. Leaders have made good use of additional funding to reinvigorate the library and to purchase additional books for pupils to read. Leaders have created inviting areas around the school, where pupils can sit on sofas and read with their friends during their recreation time, if they choose to do so. Leaders invited parents to

come into school to learn about the new approach to reading and to see it in action in class for themselves. Several parents told me that they found this opportunity very helpful.

Middle leaders now have dedicated time to undertake their leadership responsibilities. Leaders have provided important training for middle leaders to be able to undertake their duties. They follow a carefully timetabled plan so that they can discuss their findings with senior leaders when they have monitored the work of the school, and they can plan for further improvements with clarity. The leader with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) calls on the support of a range of external agencies, where this might be helpful to support a pupil's learning. She has worked alongside colleagues from Stubbin Wood School to form a network of special educational needs coordinators from schools near and far, who meet to share good practice. Some other leaders have introduced strategies, for example in the teaching of reading and mathematics and the spending of the primary physical education and sport funding. Due to the turnover of staffing in recent months, the headteacher has retained responsibility for some subject areas. This means some middle leadership roles have not yet been allocated.

Following a recent successful election for a parent governor, there is now a full complement of governors. Governors have received some useful training so that they are able to ask more challenging questions of leaders during meetings. They are increasingly holding leaders at all levels to account. Governors frequently attend training alongside staff. Governors visit school to see it in action. This helps them to ask well-informed questions of leaders about the improvements that are being made. They attend parents' evenings so that they are available should parents wish to speak with them. Governors have established committees to ensure that they undertake all their duties effectively. Governors bring a breadth of skills and experience to their role. They show a real determination to provide the appropriate balance of support and challenge to leaders so that the school can continue to improve. They are well placed to do so.

Leaders monitor attendance carefully. Pupils receive awards for good levels of attendance. Pupils spoke to me excitedly about the rewards that they receive. The headteacher has raised the importance of regular attendance with parents. For example, she includes information about attendance in the school's weekly newsletters. Leaders contact parents if they are concerned about a child's attendance, and they provide support so that the pupil's rate of attendance can improve. Leaders draw on the support of the education welfare officer if there are more serious concerns about attendance. Pupils' overall rates of attendance improved in the last school year.

In addition to focusing on making the necessary improvements identified at the last inspection, leaders have introduced several changes to the environment and to the provision at the school. They have ensured staff are trained to provide nurture

provision for pupils. Pupils have more opportunities to learn outdoors. The Junior Leadership Team represent their classmates and assist leaders by garnering the views of their peers on the improvements that are being made. The school environment is bright and welcoming, showcasing the range of subjects that pupils study and providing useful information for pupils and parents. The main school office has been moved downstairs, where parents can access it more easily. With the support of the local authority, leaders have improved the site security since the last inspection. The school improvement plan includes the areas for improvement from the last inspection and additional priorities from leaders' own, more recent, evaluation of the school's provision. The plan is clear and fit for purpose.

Leaders have placed a high priority on improving the school's relationship with parents. In addition to the reading workshop, parents have been invited into school to take part in workshops about the teaching of phonics and about behaviour management. Leaders have introduced 'messy play' and 'stay and play' sessions for young children to enjoy with their parents. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the changes that are being made. Typically, they told me that they feel welcome in school, they enjoy the workshops that teachers provide and they appreciate the increased levels of communication that mean they are better informed about school life.

External support

Leaders have commissioned useful support from Stubbin Wood School. Leaders and teachers from Stubbin Wood have provided support and coaching to improve the quality of teaching and leadership skills across this school.

Following the last inspection, the local authority provided support to governors in the appointment of a new headteacher. They have supported the leaders to review the work of the school, and to improve the quality of teaching and the school site. Recently, they have provided useful advice to enable leaders to provide additional support for pupils with SEND. They continue to provide support for leaders to review the quality of provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Di Mullan

Her Majesty's Inspector