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26 November 2018

Mrs J Richards
Headteacher (acting)
Ermine Primary Academy
Redbourne Drive
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Lincolnshire
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Dear Mrs Richards

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Ermine Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 13 and 14 November 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and the coordinator for the provision of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I also met with three members of the governing body, including the governor with oversight of safeguarding, and three representatives of the trust, including the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer. I spoke formally with a group of pupils from Year 5 and Year 6 to discuss their learning and their experiences in the school. I observed, jointly with you, pupils' learning in lessons across different year groups and we reviewed a sample of pupils' work.

I scrutinised documents, including senior leaders' evaluation of the school's work, the school's information about current pupils' progress, and pupils' behaviour, attendance and exclusion records. I examined a range of information relating to

safeguarding, including relevant policies and pupils' records, as well as the school's system for recruiting staff, some staff personnel files and the single central record. I reviewed information regarding the pupil premium funding. I also analysed recent minutes from meetings of the local governing body and the trust. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher stepped down from the position in December 2017. As a result, you agreed to become acting headteacher, having previously been the deputy headteacher. At the same time, several other staff were promoted temporarily, including the deputy and assistant headteachers, a senior leader of teaching and learning, the key stage 2 leader and the early years leader. As part of your restructuring of the leadership, you have reduced the number of senior leaders, while providing middle leaders with clearer lines of accountability and responsibility. You also provided them with sufficient time to carry out their roles effectively. A new headteacher has been appointed by the trust and is due to take up the position in January 2019.

Notable changes have also taken place within those responsible for governance. A new chief executive officer (CEO) was appointed in January 2018. Meanwhile, the chair of the governing body has recently resigned his position and relinquished his role on the board of trustees. Two new trustees have been recruited. Currently, the chair of the board of trustees is also the chair of the governing body.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Since the previous inspection report, you and the senior school leaders have not been complacent. Leaders have been reflective, accurately identifying and building on the good practice that was recognised while prioritising the areas of weakness. They have taken swift and decisive action, implementing detailed development plans that are closely linked to the school's areas for improvement. Leaders regularly review the progress of their work against clear success criteria and then modify their plans to ensure that improvements are continuous. They are aspirational for the pupils in their care and determined to improve the quality of the provision.

A culture of safeguarding now permeates the school. In the last year, leaders have sought external advice and guidance, and carried out a significant amount of work, to ensure that safeguarding practices and procedures are effective. Whether it be the posters around school reminding staff and pupils who they can talk to about their concerns, or safeguarding's high profile on the agenda of every staff or senior leadership meeting, all adults recognise their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. While there are still some minor safeguarding issues to be rectified, most of the areas for improvement relating to safeguarding have been resolved. Pupils say they feel safe in school and parents agree.

Leaders have reviewed the school's safeguarding policy and ensured that it is in line with the latest requirements. They have also put additional policies in place covering, for instance, the acceptable use of technology and the staff code of conduct. All staff have read and understood these policies, alongside the statutory guidance. Leaders regularly quiz staff about safeguarding issues to check their understanding.

Leaders follow procedures to recruit new staff rigorously. They have been fastidious in checking that personnel files of existing staff contain the required information. Where any omissions exist, leaders have either resolved them or have carried out a risk assessment to satisfy themselves that no adult poses a risk to pupils.

You took over the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) responsibilities on becoming acting headteacher. You and the deputy DSLs have had appropriate training on a range of different safeguarding-related issues. Similarly, staff receive regular safeguarding updates, covering themes such as e-safety, child sexual exploitation, honour-based violence and county lines. You ensure that new staff are up to speed with a detailed safeguarding induction programme. By implementing a well-designed, five-year training plan for safeguarding, leaders have a secure system to keep staff up to date and informed about safeguarding issues relevant to the school's context.

Pupils learn how to be safe, including on the internet. They feel listened to by adults, helping them to use an 'ask it basket' to share any concerns they have about themselves or their peers. Staff are skilled at recognising possible signs of abuse of a pupil. They make timely referrals to the DSL, using a pupil concern form, so that information is collected and shared in a consistent way. Leaders provide staff with feedback so that they know their referrals have been acted on.

Pupils' safeguarding records have been reviewed. Each pupil file now has a detailed chronology of leaders' prompt actions. However, on occasion, the records are too informal and lack sufficient detail. Leaders communicate regularly with each other to ensure no pupil falls through the net. A nurture team provides some pupils with bespoke support in response to their individual needs. Leaders also access external support for pupils when required. They are persistent and challenge agencies if they think actions taken to safeguard a pupil are not sufficient.

All adults in school have received basic first-aid training and five fully trained first-aiders are known to adults and pupils. Staff supporting individual pupils with specific medical needs, such as diabetes or epilepsy, have been given additional training. Medical plans are in place for these pupils, although they have not yet all been agreed by medical professionals. Leaders have not ensured that first-aid procedures are secure and in line with the school's policy, including in the early years. While all incidents requiring first aid are recorded, when the incident involves an injury to a pupil's head there are occasions when the pupil's parents are not informed in a timely manner.

Leaders have put secure procedures in place when pupils arrive at and leave school. Staff use school records to check the identity of the adult collecting a pupil at the end of the day. While parents say it has made the process of picking up their children slower, they are confident their children are safe.

Governors are aware of the importance of safeguarding, as evidenced by the fact that it is discussed at each of their meetings. All governors have completed basic safeguarding training, including 'Prevent' duty training, although the training has not been as comprehensive as that received by the staff. The governor responsible for safeguarding completed a safeguarding audit with a trust representative, helping leaders to identify and act upon any weaknesses in their practices or procedures.

Leaders have raised expectations of pupils' behaviour with a new behaviour policy. Pupils say the new behaviour strategies are fairer, rewarding good behaviour while helping them to learn from their mistakes. As a result, there is a positive atmosphere around the school and pupils' behaviour has improved, including fewer incidents of bullying and racism. Leaders know some staff do not yet apply the new behaviour strategies consistently.

Staff have received training in de-escalation methods and restorative techniques. Situations which may have previously led to pupils being restrained for their own safety are now skilfully defused. Leaders provide close support for a small number of pupils to help improve their behaviour and reduce the number of repeat events. The proportion of pupils who are excluded is reducing and is now below the national average. However, pupils who are disadvantaged and pupils with SEND are more likely to be excluded than other pupils.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn about the full range of subjects, including the arts and humanities, and more occasions to practise their writing skills. They have made some changes to the timetable, including timetabling subjects such as science and art in the morning. Teachers have involved pupils in choosing curriculum topics to increase their engagement and enthusiasm for the work. Pupils enjoy a varied curriculum diet, although they say they do not learn enough about geography.

The leaders of mathematics and English have more clearly defined roles and sufficient time allocated for them to be more effective. They are beginning to monitor and evaluate the work taking place in their areas of responsibility more closely, using their subject knowledge to provide teachers with additional support. Some middle leaders, for example the leader of phonics, are well established in their roles. However, the work of most middle leaders is still in its early stages and, therefore, is yet to have a consistent impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Leaders hold regular progress meetings with teachers and middle leaders to discuss how well pupils are achieving. They increasingly expect teachers to take

responsibility for the outcomes of the pupils in their classes. However, leaders' analysis of pupils' outcomes places too great an emphasis on pupils' attainment and lacks a detailed consideration of the progress of different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Leaders are not yet analysing information about different pupil groups strategically to allow them to provide the pupils with the most effective support.

While pupils are beginning to take more responsibility for their own learning, teachers do not consistently use information about pupils' prior learning to inform their planning and ensure that work matches the pupils' needs. Teachers have increased their expectations of what pupils can achieve through planning 'raising the roof' tasks. However, they do not challenge pupils consistently to make stronger progress.

Leaders acknowledge that improvements in teaching and learning have only recently started to be addressed. Therefore, any actions are only in their early stages and are not yet having a sustained impact on pupils' outcomes. For instance, in 2018, pupils' attainment in reading, mathematics and writing at the end of Year 2 was too low compared with national averages. Current key stage 1 pupils are still not achieving well enough, including disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders' plans to support disadvantaged pupils are not sufficiently detailed. Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have not ensured that the allocation of additional funding for these pupils is focused precisely on improving their outcomes. They do not evaluate the strategies used to support these pupils rigorously to modify their actions.

Children make good progress in the early years provision. Leaders plan closely to meet their needs and move their learning on to the next stage. The outside area has clearly defined zones and includes a wide range of learning opportunities, with a focus currently on developing children's gross motor skills and coordination. Adults have received training and support to improve their understanding of children's learning outdoors and the opportunities it presents. They communicate effectively with the children, helping to develop their speech and language skills and promoting good relationships.

The early years provision is compliant with statutory requirements. All children in the Nursery have a key worker assigned to them. These adults check the children in their care throughout the day to ensure their welfare needs are being met. Ratios of adults to children are appropriate. Leaders have acted on the outcomes of a safeguarding audit carried out by the local authority to ensure that the children are safe and their welfare is at the heart of the provision's work.

An external review of governance was carried out in April 2018. In response to the review, governors have been linked to different areas of the school to improve their oversight and understanding of the school's work. This arrangement is still in its

early days and is yet to have impact. Governors monitor the school's plans for improvement more closely and ask increasingly searching questions. However, they do not have the necessary skills to interrogate the information on pupils' outcomes thoroughly.

Trust leaders have been too slow to provide school leaders with additional support to resolve the areas for improvement from the last inspection. While the new CEO has offered more support and challenge to school leaders, many of the action points identified in the governance review have not been acted on by trust leaders.

School leaders are taking effective action to improve the school, in spite of the limited support from the trust. They have sought external support from, for example, the Lincolnshire Learning Partnership, the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board and other local primary schools. Work with the local authority has helped to improve the early years provision and leaders have recently registered for the LENS project to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation

the school's improvement plan is fit for purpose

the trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action, by:

- closely monitoring and evaluating the impact of additional funding received by the school for disadvantaged pupils to ensure that these pupils make stronger progress.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Tordoff
Her Majesty's Inspector