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Ms Victoria Sumner
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Sumner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hawkesley Church Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 22 January 2019, 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 trust 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.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that all newly introduced improvement strategies are fully embedded and routinely evaluated for their impact on pupils' outcomes
- eliminate any remaining quality of teaching that does not meet the new, higher, expected standards
- ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills are addressed quickly and effectively, especially for the most-able pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the acting head of school, other senior leaders, the multi-academy trust's chief executive officer (CEO), the executive governing board (EGB) and the school improvement partner to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement and action plans were evaluated. Other activities undertaken included a learning walk in all year groups, including Nursery and Reception classes, work scrutiny and evaluation of the outcomes of monitoring activities, including leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been many significant changes to the school. The school is now a member of the Birmingham Diocesan Academies Trust. The headteacher has left the school. A new executive headteacher and head of school have been appointed from the trust. Leaders have undertaken a full review of all the school's systems and its organisational structure. There has also been a significant turnover of staff.

Main findings

The school has experienced a complete restructure of the senior leadership team since joining the trust shortly after the previous inspection. An executive headteacher from the trust is now the substantive headteacher of the school. She currently supports the school for three days each week; plans are in place to increase this to full-time. A capable head of school has been appointed who leads the school on a day-to-day basis with a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching. This structure has improved stability and increased senior leadership capacity.

In the very short time that these leaders have been in post, they have been extremely strategic in their approach. They began with a deep and detailed review of all of the information they had about pupils' progress, and the quality of teaching, behaviour and attendance. They are honest about the challenges ahead and about the significant negative impact years of weak teaching have had, particularly on the achievement of current Year 5 and 6 pupils.

This review revealed that as a result of weak checks in the past, the school had not effectively addressed concerns around pupils' outcomes, behaviour and attendance. Leaders added these priorities to the action plans for improvement and started effectively addressing these issues as soon as they commenced their roles. As a result, the quality of teaching, pupils' behaviour and attendance are improving.

All leaders' new action plans are clear and concise. They are detailed, focusing sharply on the areas that need most urgent improvements and include concise and

robust lines of accountability. Leaders now need to ensure that all improvement strategies are routinely analysed and evaluated for the impact they are having on improving pupils' outcomes.

Action to improve the effectiveness of teaching is well underway and is beginning to have a positive impact. As a result of a range of improvements to the curriculum, teachers are now more secure in teaching a well-balanced and broad curriculum that offers pupils a range of learning experiences beyond English and mathematics. Pupils benefit from a topic-based curriculum in which they gain skills and knowledge around each topic. Theme-based days and visits further develop pupils' understanding around the chosen theme.

Due to previous weak teaching, pupils, especially the most-able, have large gaps in their knowledge and skills. Teaching across the school has improved significantly and continues to do so. Leaders model excellent practice and make effective use of external support to provide further training and validate the quality of teaching. Although improving rapidly, the quality of teaching is not yet strong enough to close these gaps quickly. Leaders have plans in place to address this issue. The impact of that work is yet to be seen.

Pupils' attainment and progress have been below those of other pupils nationally. This is because of previous ineffective checking of how well pupils are doing. Leaders have restructured the assessment system and are now able to pinpoint when pupils fall behind and need extra support to catch up. For example, the teaching of phonics now successfully supports pupils who are struggling to read more complex material. As a result, pupils catch up and their scores improve. Most-able pupils still have some way to go before their attainment and progress are in line with others nationally. The newly introduced teaching and learning strategy is beginning to show signs of improving this issue. The impact of the action on pupils' outcomes remains to be seen.

In the past, pupils' low literacy skills resulted in their work being marred with spelling mistakes and poor handwriting. Current pupils' work shows much better handwriting, spelling and punctuation. This is because teachers are now quick to correct pupils' misconceptions. Pupils talk with pride about their learning. They read often and now more of them read for pleasure. They say that they enjoy reading.

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved notably. When they started at the school, leaders introduced a new system for managing pupils' behaviour that all pupils understand fully, and teachers apply consistently. As a result, fixed-term exclusions have reduced and incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Pupils enjoy school; consequently, fewer of them are absent from school and attendance has improved to broadly in line with national figures. The school is a calm and purposeful learning environment with friendly and courteous pupils who are proud of their school.

Teachers now have high expectations of their pupils and what they can achieve. As a result, pupils complete work that is generally matched well to their needs and abilities. At times, teachers do not routinely present the most-able pupils with work that stretches their thinking and/or deepens their learning. Consequently, these pupils do not yet make the progress they should.

External support

Since joining the trust, the school has benefited from a range of effective support; not least that of the new leadership team. The trust has created an EGB to ensure that leaders are held effectively to account. The EGB is chaired by the trust's CEO, who is passionate about improving this school. Board members provide both support and challenge to senior leaders. They assure themselves of effective improvement plans and hold leaders to account for the implementation and success of the strategies introduced. As a result, the school has, in a very short period of time, improved markedly. The trust has provided funding for an improvement partner who also scrutinises leaders' actions and ensures that improvement strategies are fit for purpose.

Being part of the trust has afforded staff at the school many opportunities that they previously did not have. For example, teachers now moderate pupils' work together to ensure that assessment information is accurate. They share best practice and benefit from ongoing professional dialogue with colleagues from other schools.

I am copying this letter to the CEO of the multi-academy trust, the director of education for the Diocese of Birmingham, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Birmingham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Bianka Zemke
Her Majesty's Inspector