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Mr Paul Prest
Thomas Hinderwell Primary Academy
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Dear Mr Prest

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomas Hinderwell Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 14 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 academy 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the academy to become good.

The academy should take further action to:

- ensure that teachers use assessment information to inform their planning so that work in lessons is matched correctly to pupils' needs, particularly for the most able pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- continue to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND
- develop the skills of senior and middle leaders to analyse carefully the progress of all pupils, and take steps to intervene where progress is slow
- ensure that timescales and success measures in improvement plans are sharply focused and precise enough to allow governors to hold leaders to account more easily.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior and middle leaders, the pastoral manager, the regional director of the David Ross Education Trust and two governors, including the chair of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement documents were evaluated, along with a range of other documentation, including records of monitoring and external support. We visited lessons together and observed teaching. I spoke to some pupils about their work and looked through pupils' books in lessons. I telephoned one parent to ask specific questions about one area of the school's improvement work.

Context

There have been substantial changes in the school's leadership and staffing since the previous inspection. The current principal was appointed on an interim basis in September 2018 and the trust has recently made this appointment permanent. There has been a high turnover of teaching staff since the last inspection. A number of recently appointed teachers are new to the profession. The chair of the governing body has also changed since the last inspection and there have been other changes within the governing body. The school has sought external support from a range of sources to support their improvement work. A pupil premium review is planned for March 2019.

Main findings

Leaders have made slow progress in tackling the areas for improvement identified during the September 2017 inspection. While the trust has increased the urgency of its response since September 2018, its support for the school during 2017/18 was slow. High turnover of staff and long-term absences further inhibited the school's journey towards becoming good or better overall.

Leaders' improvement plans are generic. They do not focus sharply enough on the areas requiring improvement. The timescales and measures to judge the impact of leaders' actions are not specific enough. This makes it more difficult for governors to hold staff to account. The overall pace of improvement has been too slow.

Monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is too infrequent and lacks precise detail in checking that recommendations made by leaders have been implemented by teachers. For example, training has been given to improve the teaching of reading, but there is insufficient focus in identifying what works and what needs to be adapted, and where further work is needed.

Leaders' own view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is that it is not consistently good or better. Leaders' search for effective systems and processes has dominated the school's work, but chosen strategies are not always embedded

well enough and they are changed frequently. These frequent changes, coupled with insufficient identification of the barriers to pupils' learning, have further slowed pupils' progress. Staffing turbulence has also inhibited progression as many staff require catch-up training.

Leaders' monitoring records show that they are aware that pupils' letter formation needs further attention. Leaders have not followed up quickly on this issue. They have not checked that teachers have taken effective action to address the identified priorities. As such, too many pupils have struggled to establish fluent, cursive handwriting.

Leaders and teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan pupils' next learning steps. Some teachers slavishly follow external schemes of work even when the lessons suggested are not relevant or suitable for their pupils. Some lower-attaining pupils struggle in class because the barriers to their learning have not been clearly identified. This makes it difficult for them to catch up. Work is often too easy for the most able pupils in some key stage 2 classes.

The school's phonics results remain as low as they were when the school was first identified as requiring improvement in 2015. In 2018, only half of the pupils in Year 6 left the school able to read at the required standard, with too few pupils achieving the higher standard in all subjects and at all key stages.

Governors are unclear about what actions are taking place to address weak teaching or the impact of leaders' actions. Leaders, including subject leaders, have not routinely evaluated and analysed the impact of training and strategies to help pupils catch up.

Disadvantaged pupils are not benefiting enough from additional funding in the form of the pupil premium grant. This is because leaders are not sharply identifying the barriers that are preventing pupils from securing basic skills. Some disadvantaged pupils performed better than other pupils in the 2018 Year 6 tests, but governors do not realise how low this benchmark was, leading them to an overinflated self-evaluation of the progress and attainment of this group of pupils. Governors have planned a pupil premium review to offer the necessary external challenge and review of this aspect of the school's work, but this has been delayed until March 2019.

There are some more recent encouraging signs that the school's work is starting to gather pace and move in the right direction. For example, governors are beginning to find out about the impact of the school's work at first hand, rather than relying too heavily on information provided and taken at face value. Attendance is also beginning to improve, although persistent absence is proving harder to shift.

External support

The David Ross Education Trust has provided direct support to the school and this

has increased since September 2018. A specialist in early years has provided close guidance and the setting has been refurbished with additional funds from the trust. Teachers have been released to go and observe good teaching in other schools within the trust. An additional teacher has been provided to help the Year 6 teacher deliver supplementary catch-up sessions to help more Year 6 pupils meet the required standards in 2019.

Leaders have drawn upon an extended range of mathematics resources and used expertise from the local 'Maths Hub'. The impact of this is evident in improved mathematics results in key stages 1 and 2 in 2018.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Ralph
Her Majesty's Inspector