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Mr Alex Prior
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Dear Mr Prior

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wenlock CofE Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 28 March 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.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in February 2018, 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.

The school should take further action to:

- embed the recently introduced teaching approaches to ensure that these are having a sustainable impact on improving pupils' outcomes
- strengthen governors' understanding of pupils' outcomes beyond English and mathematics, so that they can hold leaders more stringently to account for pupils' achievement across all subjects.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for English, mathematics, science, computing, and religious

education (RE). Additionally, I met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body, and the school's local authority improvement advisor. The focus of these meetings was to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I reviewed the school's own evaluation, the strategic development plan and several subject leader action plans. I visited most classes, reviewed pupils' work and scrutinised a range of documents relating to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. I spoke informally to pupils in classrooms about their learning and met more formally with a group of pupils to talk about their school experience. I also spoke with several parents at the beginning of the school day.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in February 2018, there have been changes in the leadership of the school. The previous headteacher left at the end of the summer term 2018, and you joined the school as headteacher in September 2018. At this time, the deputy headteacher returned to her role having taken maternity leave. Two of the four year leaders were new to role in September 2018. An experienced governor took over the role of the chair for the governing body in September 2018. All current governors were appointed before the previous inspection. The staff team has largely remained the same – nine of the 12 current teachers were in post at the time of the previous inspection.

Main findings

Since taking up the post of headteacher, you have focused resolutely on the pupils in your care. You are uncompromising in your desire for the school to improve continually. With the support of the deputy headteacher, you are creating a positive learning culture through your intent to share responsibilities, increase accountability and give staff ownership of systems and routines. As a result, staff are very motivated to be part of 'Team Wenlock'. Morale is high, and teachers are taking increasing responsibility for pupils' outcomes.

Leaders have acted swiftly upon areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, they consider the learning needs of different groups of pupils and raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. Leaders meet regularly with teaching staff and use a range of information to assess the progress that pupils are making. Leaders use these meetings to ensure that action is taken quickly to support pupils to make at least good progress. This is especially the case for the most able pupils, who are now given more challenging work. Pupils who are not making enough progress are also accurately identified and helped so they catch up quickly. The staff team report that they feel very well supported by senior and middle leaders. They feel that they are listened to and every effort is made to help them improve their skills. Staff take part in training and work well together to share best practice to help improve the quality of their teaching.

Teachers have good relationships with their pupils and know them well. Pupils work

well together and are respectful of each other's opinions. Teachers' raised expectations of what pupils can achieve are clearly evident, for example in the improved quality of pupils' work across the school.

Leaders have carefully considered how to improve classroom environments in all year groups. Attractive displays celebrate pupils' achievements and remind them of all that they have learned. Leaders' high expectations are evident through the agreed features that they expect to see in every class. Examples include teachers' detailed records of each pupil's learning journey and pupils' displays of 'learning we've wrestled with'. Pupils enjoy school because the learning experiences their teachers plan for them are relevant and engaging. They told me that their teachers 'make learning fun' and that in their 'interesting lessons' they 'get to learn about lots of different things'. Pupils were proud to show me the work in their books, which demonstrates clear progress in a range of different subjects.

The year leaders are committed and enthusiastic. They are now playing a more effective role in supporting senior leaders to drive up standards through regularly monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and pupils' learning in their year groups. They are providing teachers and teaching assistants with appropriate support, challenge, advice and training. As a result, teachers' planning, and the lessons taught, more accurately meet pupils' needs. Overall, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, are making better progress than in previous years. Nevertheless, many teaching approaches are new. Senior and middle leaders have made sure that these new ways have been introduced consistently throughout the school. Leaders' development plans rightly include actions to monitor and review the effectiveness of these approaches to make sure that teaching remains successful over time and pupils' outcomes continue to improve.

Subject leadership has developed rapidly within the school. Subject leaders are positive about the changes that are taking place and they contribute to school improvement effectively. Subject leaders' action plans for their individual subjects are based on the wide range of monitoring activities such as observing lessons, scrutinising teachers' plans, talking to pupils and looking at pupils' workbooks. The actions identify clear next steps for further development. Subject leaders provide training and support so that teachers are confident to plan and teach all areas of the curriculum. Consequently, pupils are now being given many opportunities to use their knowledge and skills across all subjects.

Importantly, leaders have improved the school's chosen system for assessing and recording pupils' achievements across all subjects. Teachers have received training in how to assess pupils' progress accurately. This has enabled them to evaluate where their pupils are and plan future learning based on what pupils already know and can do. Leaders have built in regular opportunities for teachers to check their judgements with colleagues across the school. Consequently, the quality of teaching across the wider curriculum is improving. Teachers are now in a stronger position to tailor provision to meet the needs of different groups of pupils in all subjects.

Since your arrival, you and the deputy headteacher have focused on enhancing pupils' experiences and ensuring that a broad and engaging curriculum is put in place throughout the school. You are determined to provide high-quality and memorable experiences that pupils might otherwise not get. Learning resources are being enhanced. Typical examples of this are new digital technology being introduced to enable pupils to use 3D printing and experience film-making as part of their learning. The school library is being refurbished to encourage pupils to access a range of high-quality books and develop a love of reading. Additionally, outside, the installation of artificial grass will give pupils a much larger play and sporting area to use throughout the year.

Leaders and governors have constructed precise development plans which identify the correct priorities for improvement. These plans include regular checking points so that leaders and governors can measure success accurately. This sharp and focused approach has been effective in bringing about improvements to the school, particularly to the quality of teaching and, subsequently, pupils' outcomes.

Governors take their responsibilities seriously and they contribute to the improvements being made. Governors visit the school frequently and ask senior and middle leaders challenging questions about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The minutes of recent governing body meetings demonstrate that governors are improving their knowledge and understanding of most aspects of the school's work. While this is the case, governors do not yet have a clear understanding of pupils' achievements in subjects other than English and mathematics and so do not hold leaders fully to account for this aspect of the school's performance.

External support

The local authority is providing effective support. The local authority responded quickly to the findings of the previous inspection by increasing their level of support to the school. Local authority consultants have been deployed to support staff and the improvement partner makes regular visits to check on progress and to challenge leaders and governors on the impact of their actions. At the request of school leaders, the local authority recently conducted a review of the school's improvement work. This support has helped improve all aspects identified at the previous inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Webb
Her Majesty's Inspector