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Mr Richard Gartland
Springfield Academy
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Dear Mr Gartland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Springfield Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 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 and the board of trustees 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 teachers provide appropriate challenge, particularly for the most able pupils, in order to raise the proportion of pupils attaining the higher standards
- continue to reduce persistent absence and the number of holidays taken during term time.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. Meetings with the chief executive officer (CEO) and members of the local governing body also took place to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and the school self-evaluation document. I also reviewed documentation relating to pupil assessment information; monitoring of teaching and learning; governance and attendance. I observed teaching and learning with you, listened to pupils read, held discussions with pupils about their learning and reviewed their work in books. I met with parents at the beginning of the school day. I also reviewed the checks that are made on the suitability of adults to work with children.

Context

Since the last inspection, a new chair of the governing body has been appointed. A new governor has also joined the governing body. An external review of pupil premium funding was carried out in October 2018. One teacher has left the school and a new lead practitioner has been appointed to lead on the curriculum and to provide coaching and mentoring to staff. There have also been some changes to senior leaders' roles and responsibilities. For instance, the deputy headteacher is now the pupil premium leader. Further changes are due to be made when a teacher leaves at the end of term and another is due to take up post in September 2019.

Main findings

You have acted with urgency, clarity and determination to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. You, rightly, have high expectations of yourself, other leaders, staff and pupils. Parents speak highly of you and your school leaders, stating that the school is well led and managed. You know the school exceptionally well. As a result, you correctly identify the strengths and achievements of staff and pupils, but recognise with precision where there is still more work to be done.

Your school improvement plan effectively focuses on the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. All leaders play an active role in taking action and evaluating the impact of these actions, because it is a working document. Leaders carry out regular monitoring activities, such as workbook scrutiny, to check on the quality of teaching and learning and the progress that pupils make. Leaders at all levels are determined to improve outcomes for pupils further.

There are some new governors in post, including a new chair of the governing

body. They have reviewed, and improved, how they provide challenge to you and your leaders to ensure that leaders' actions are resulting in rapid improvement. The governing body is able to support and challenge you appropriately because governors know the school well and have a clear understanding of what needs to improve. This is because they receive useful and honest information in your termly principal report to governors. Governing body meeting minutes show that governors are not afraid to ask pertinent and challenging questions of leaders.

You have strengthened teaching across the school since the last inspection. Your detailed systems to check on the quality, and the consistency, of teaching provides you with accurate information about the effectiveness of every teacher. Since his appointment in September 2018, your lead practitioner has provided targeted coaching for teachers across the school, including those who are less experienced. Teachers have responded positively to this style of professional development and leaders' feedback. Teachers also access relevant training courses. The supportive culture that you have created enables staff to seek advice and, as a result, staff morale is high. The subsequent checks which you make show that this professional development is enabling teachers to expand their expertise and skills. This has eradicated any weak teaching and is leading to greater consistency in the quality of teaching across key stages 1 and 2.

The leader of mathematics has clear expectations of how teachers should use assessment to plan learning for pupils. Teachers have developed their assessment skills through working with the lead practitioner. Teachers work together, including with teachers from other schools, to check that their assessments are accurate. The mathematics leader's subject knowledge in mathematics is secure. She has supported teachers to develop their subject knowledge in mathematics through training and by directing support from the lead practitioner. Pupils' books indicate that the work set for pupils is generally matched to their ability. On occasion, some most-able pupils spend too much time recapping on what they already know or can do before they move to challenging work.

Developing pupils' reading skills has been a focus since the last inspection. Pupils' reading records show that they have regular opportunities to read. The reading books that pupils access are matched well to their reading skills and abilities. This enables pupils to be fluent and confident readers. The English leader checks regularly on the how teachers plan reading lessons to encourage pupils to read, understand and discuss the features of a text in depth. There is a strong focus on ensuring that pupils are developing their vocabulary skills so that they have a better understanding of more-complicated texts.

As a result of leaders improving the quality of teaching and learning in reading, writing and mathematics this academic year, the rate of progress for current pupils has improved. There is currently a higher proportion of pupils on track to meet the expected and higher standards at the end of key stages 1 and 2 compared to 2018. The proportion of pupils working within the age-related expectations across the

school is consistent in each year group. However, the proportion of pupils working within the greater depths of learning across the school is still more variable.

Since his appointment in September 2018, the lead practitioner has also been leading on the curriculum. The curriculum leader reviewed the curriculum and has ensured that the curriculum content offered to pupils is skills-based and meets the needs of the national curriculum, pupils' interests and what is important in the community. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the wider curriculum subjects such as art, design and technology, French, and physical education, as well as saying that they enjoy English and mathematics. Part of this recently created leadership role is to develop the skills and expertise of subject leaders so that they can take effective action to improve their areas of responsibility. The curriculum leader checks regularly on the work that teachers plan and looks at work in pupils' wider curriculum books to check on the knowledge and skills that pupils are developing. Subject leaders have willingly taken on board advice and coaching from the curriculum leader. As a result, the wider curriculum books show that pupils are now learning and applying subject-specific skills and knowledge in each subject.

Pupils' attendance has improved. The procedures that you have in place to check on pupil absenteeism are thorough and effective. You and the home-school mentor have worked closely with families to support them with any barriers which prevent their children from attending school regularly. Parents speak highly of the home-school mentor and say that her work is making a difference. Consequently, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has decreased significantly compared to the same period last year. Overall attendance of pupils is broadly in line with national averages and continuing to improve. Parents who take their children on holiday during term time contribute notably to the number of pupil absences. This is something you strongly discourage. You recognise that although there has been a significant improvement in attendance since the last inspection, this remains an area to continue to improve.

As recommended at the previous inspection, you commissioned a review of the use of the pupil premium funding. Leaders were keen to implement the recommendations made in this external review. For example, the deputy headteacher is now the pupil premium lead and she has ensured that all leaders are clear about how additional funding is being used. The way in which teaching assistants are deployed has been changed to match their skills and talents. This has impacted positively on the disadvantaged pupils, who receive timely and appropriate support from additional adults in lessons. A large proportion of pupils are disadvantaged. You use pupil progress meetings to ensure that their progress is carefully tracked and to identify any barriers to learning. You and your pupil premium leader are determined that disadvantaged pupils will have the same opportunities as other pupils and that they will achieve well. It is too soon to see the impact of this work.

External support

You have welcomed the support and professional challenge of the CEO of the multi-academy trust. You have also worked well with other headteacher colleagues within, and external to, the trust. You have used the partnerships to sharpen and validate your monitoring of teaching and learning across the school. You and your pupil premium leader have liaised effectively with the external pupil premium reviewer. Staff frequently access a wide range of support as part of the multi-academy trust. They also have opportunities to share good practice with colleagues in local schools.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the CEO of the Education Village multi-academy trust and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Aitchison
Her Majesty's Inspector