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Miss E Williams
Pennyhill Primary School
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Dear Miss Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pennyhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the monitoring 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 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 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 ensure that:

- pupils have more opportunities to apply their skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling independently so that these become more automatic
- teachers become more confident and adept at adapting their teaching to address the needs of all pupils, by breaking learning down into more manageable chunks or setting more open-ended tasks where appropriate
- pupils read increasingly challenging books so that they become more fluent readers from an earlier age.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings took place with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector met with staff and pupils and visited lessons. The inspector spoke to the chair of the governing body and the local authority school improvement adviser on the telephone. The school improvement plan was evaluated. The inspector reviewed minutes of governing body meetings, curriculum plans and records of monitoring activities. The inspector also looked at work in pupils' books and, during lesson visits, spoke to pupils about their work.

Context

Since the last full inspection, there have been several changes to the teaching staff. However, the teaching staff is now more stable and there have been no changes to the senior leadership team. The chair of the governing body took up the role just after the last inspection.

Main findings

The headteacher has set high expectations, which staff now share. Together with the deputy headteacher, governors and staff, she has ensured that appropriate actions are being taken to improve the school.

The school is now a very different place. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have put in place appropriate training and support. They have focused on changing the culture of the school, and improving leadership and teaching. They have invested in staff and strengthened monitoring procedures. All leaders welcome being held to account for the impact of their actions. They know that this needed to be much more robust. As a result, the quality of education is improving.

Several teachers have left the school since the last inspection. Staffing is more stable now. This means that the training and support that leaders are providing is becoming more embedded in teachers' practice. For new staff and those who have stayed, there is now a vibrant, professional atmosphere. This promotes high-quality discussion amongst the staff about how children learn and how best to plan the curriculum.

There have been significant changes to leaders' monitoring since the last inspection. The school development plan now focuses on the remaining weaknesses. Leaders' reports to governors are sharper and report against specific priorities. This means that now governors can, and do, ask more strategic questions about the impact of leaders' actions.

The way in which assessment information is used has been refined further. Teachers are gaining a clearer understanding of where pupils need extra support.

There are signs of improved progress across the school. By the end of key stage 2 in 2018 progress had improved in writing and mathematics. Progress by the end of key stage 2 in 2019 was not so strong. Leaders analysed the reasons for this dip. They are confident that progress will improve in future.

Leaders have put together a programme of support for teachers, bringing in outside consultants to help them. They have planned this carefully so that the work will really help to improve teaching in the school. Teachers have been trained as 'teacher educators' to support others. Teachers say that the recent training for 'teacher educators' has brought a real buzz to the school. There is now an exciting culture of learning for everyone.

The feedback which teachers receive on their teaching is now much more specific and focused. Before, leaders commented on compliance with policies and procedures. Now, leaders make sure teachers have accurate evaluations of what is going well and what needs to improve further. Senior leaders check that the feedback is consistent across the school. This approach has already helped many teachers to improve their skills.

Subject leadership has improved since the last inspection. With support from the deputy headteacher, subject leaders are now helping teachers to map out what pupils need to learn by when in each subject. They set out on one page the sequence of learning year by year and term by term. This helps teachers to see how knowledge and skills build on previous learning. Pupils and parents say this helps them too. Some pupils use this as a starting point to carry out their own research into the topic at home.

Leaders set clear expectations for the standard of pupils' work across the curriculum. They expect pupils to show the same standard of literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects, not just English and mathematics. However, work in pupils' books shows that these 'non-negotiables' are not yet embedded. Errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling persist in some pupils' work. Older pupils in particular should not need reminding of basic spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils need more opportunities to apply their skills independently so that they become more automatic.

Teachers have had training on using assessment information to help them respond to pupils' needs more effectively in lessons. This is already helping teachers to reflect on how they need to adapt their teaching to address the needs of individual pupils. Teachers set bronze, silver and gold challenges, known as 'the metals'. These help teachers to sequence learning. Some pupils need the learning to be broken down into even more manageable chunks. Others need more open-ended tasks. While some teachers are confidently using these methods to help pupils to learn, others are not there yet.

There is now a much stronger focus on teaching the full range of reading skills. In the past, the teaching of reading focused on simple skills such as recalling key facts.

Teachers now teach all reading skills. These include comprehension, inference and deduction. Pupils are able to talk about the skills they are using to understand what they read. Some pupils, even in Year 6, are still not fluent readers. The books they read are not challenging enough. This limits their vocabulary and does not prepare them for secondary school.

Work in pupils' books shows that pupils now have more opportunities to solve real-life problems in mathematics. This is helping to improve their basic arithmetic and reasoning skills. Pupils now explain how they solved their calculations in writing. This helps teachers to spot any mistakes in pupils' reasoning.

External support

The support provided by the local authority is helping to move the school forward. The headteacher particularly values the support of the local authority school improvement adviser. Governors like to be present when the adviser visits. This way they can see for themselves what still needs to improve. The adviser has an accurate and objective view of the school and provides appropriate challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Spilsbury
Her Majesty's Inspector