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Mrs Mary Haney
Headteacher
Lynsted and Norton Primary School
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Dear Mrs Haney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lynsted and Norton Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 October 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders 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:

- sharpen the school improvement plan by including measurable success criteria that governors and trustees can monitor
- continue to refine curriculum planning so that it identifies what leaders want pupils to know and be able to do in each year group and subject by the end of each term.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), the multi-academy trust chief executive officer, and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Together with yourself, I visited lessons and looked at pupils' work. I evaluated a range of the school's documents, including your self-evaluation and records relating to safeguarding and behaviour. I checked the single central record. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day.

Context

After the previous inspection, the headteacher left the school. Following this, an executive headteacher was appointed. However, the executive headteacher also left the school in March 2019. The school's current headteacher was appointed in September 2019. The number of pupils attending the school has declined since the last inspection. In September 2019, two new teachers joined the school. All classes now have permanent teachers.

The school has been part of the Village Academy Trust since September 2011. In July 2019, the chief executive officer of the Potential In Everyone Academy Trust (PIEAT) became the chief executive officer of the Village Academy Trust.

Main findings

Together with the trust, you have concentrated on strengthening school systems. Leaders have made a good start in tackling the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. You have put in place quality assurance activities that enable you to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan is well thought through and identifies actions that need to be taken. However, the plan is limited because the success criteria for evaluating these actions in the longer term are not clear.

Since the last inspection, leaders have reviewed the curriculum. They have developed an outline plan for a broad curriculum. As a result, curriculum plans show the knowledge and skills that will be developed in each topic in each year group. This means that teachers understand what pupils need to know and remember in each topic that is studied. These plans have only recently been introduced. However, as a result of following these new plans, teachers' expectations of pupils are beginning to rise across the school. You have also introduced improved ways of assessing what pupils know and understand. Teachers are beginning to use accurate information about pupils' achievements to plan activities that meet pupils' needs.

The SENCo ensures that plans to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well designed. Teachers are developing their understanding of what works best for pupils with SEND because support strategies are clearly recorded. As a result, pupils with SEND are beginning to make better progress in lessons.

Leaders are supporting teachers, and particularly teachers new to the school, well. For example, teachers receive good-quality training and accurate information about their pupils before teaching new classes. This means that teachers are better prepared to meet pupils' needs. Weak teaching in the past means that many pupils have gaps in their knowledge, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Nevertheless, leaders are putting plans in place to improve teaching and help pupils make better progress. For example, in lessons, the 'working wall' allows pupils to recap and remember knowledge from previous lessons by looking at the summaries that pupils or teachers have created.

Staff feel well supported by leaders and the trust. Staff said that you are mindful of their opinions and the amount of work that they have to do. They appreciate the opportunities that they have to visit other schools within the trust and within PIEAT. Teachers told me that this has been useful in helping them to reflect on their own teaching. Teachers are benefiting from well-targeted training in the things that matter. They have attended joint training sessions with teachers from other schools in the trust and in PIEAT. For example, teachers are trained in how to get the best out of whole-class reading.

Parents are beginning to change their opinions of the school. In the past, parents have felt that the school has not been well led and managed. However, several parents told me that, under your leadership, things are improving. They now have more opportunities to become involved in school life. For example, several parents attend school assemblies and coffee mornings. Many parents feel that communication from the school is improving.

Pupils told me that teaching has recently improved. They said that they have to work harder in class and that teachers encourage them to follow instructions and concentrate well. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and outside of school.

The Village Academy Trust delegates certain functions to the Local Academy Council (LAC). Members of the LAC visit the school to check on the progress of improvements. They are committed to the school. They are becoming increasingly effective because they understand their role well and communication with the trust is improving. The trust and the LAC are making sure that the school has the resources it needs to train staff well and concentrate on improving pupils' knowledge and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics across the school.

External support

Leaders and teachers are benefiting from the external support provided by PIEAT. The Village Academy Trust and PIEAT now have the same chief operating officer. This means that support from PIEAT is coordinated well. PIEAT's school improvement leader works in the school for one day each week. This strong support has helped staff to benefit from the expertise of colleagues in other schools within PIEAT. For example, a mentoring programme has been put in place so that each teacher has meetings with a colleague in another school within PIEAT to discuss their teaching and share what works well. This has led to developments in teaching. Consequently, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is beginning to improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Kent. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Harry Ingham

Her Majesty's Inspector