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Mr Michael Arthur
Headteacher
Toner Avenue Primary School
Johnston Avenue
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Dear Mr Arthur

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Toner Avenue Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 December 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:

- continue to refine curriculum plans, so that step by step they build pupils' subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding, in order that pupils know and remember more in a range of subjects
- ensure that subject leaders are given the time they need to monitor the implementation of their curriculum plans, and iron out any remaining variations in practice
- continue the efforts being made to improve pupils' attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils regularly absent from school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, senior leaders, curriculum subject

leaders, members of the governing body, including the chair, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

The school improvement plan was evaluated, along with subject leader action plans. Documents relating to safeguarding procedures were reviewed, including the single central register of checks made on the suitability of adults to work in the school. The school's procedures for managing pupils' absence and behaviour were also evaluated.

It was agreed with the headteacher that a review of the quality of education would involve focusing on reading, mathematics and science. Together with subject leaders, I visited lessons, reviewed curriculum plans and looked at pupils' work in books.

I reviewed the outcomes of local authority support and monitoring activities as well as records of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the last inspection, the school has increased in size and moved into a new building. You have managed this process well. To accommodate increasing pupil numbers, you have expanded the senior leadership team. An assistant headteacher now has oversight for managing pupils' attendance and behaviour. There have been considerable staffing changes this year. Several new members of staff are in post. You are also managing several long-term absences. You do not shy away from the bold decisions needed to improve practice.

Main findings

You were asked to improve the quality of leaders' improvement planning. You have done this. Priorities are succinct, and the actions taken are appropriate. Key milestones of success link to gains in pupils' attainment and progress. These are closely aligned to national averages.

Your pupil premium strategy contains all required information. It identifies the main barriers to learning experienced by disadvantaged pupils. In 2019, some improvements were evident in the progress made by pupils by the end of Year 6. However, you know there is still work to do to diminish the gaps in attainment that remain between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. You have ensured that the school is inclusive, and you welcome all new pupils to the school, managing some pupils with complex needs well. Moving into a new building, with an increased pupil roll, means you have school places available. This is leading to a high number of pupils joining the school during the academic year. You know their achievement needs monitoring carefully, as the school continues to grow.

A new behaviour policy has been introduced. There are clear sanctions set for all

staff to follow before senior leaders get involved. This has eased some of the pressures on you needing to deal with any inappropriate behaviour. Pupils have noticed a difference. They told me that behaviour is so much better, particularly at playtime. Pupils said that there are less arguments at playtime now. They link this to not now having a multipurpose games area in their new school. The pupils cited this as being a cause of many disagreements in the past. As one pupil said: 'It used to be chaotic! But it's so much better now!' Pupils also said there are 'loads of things on'. The introduction of OPALS (outdoor play and learning supervisors) has also helped. Pupils in this role are very proud of their efforts. They take this responsibility seriously. They explained the importance of making playtime creative. By planning various activities and games they hope to do this; for example, during the inspection they organised an obstacle course. You have also purchased an electronic system for recording and analysing behaviour incidents. So far, you have categorised the types of incidents occurring. Overall, the number of incidents are declining as procedures become embedded. You are not yet analysing pupil groups and location of incidents. You agreed this is your next step.

Systems to manage pupils' absence are in place. A review of pupils' attendance has taken place. You have issued over 70 warning letters to parents and carers, linked to poor attendance. You work closely with local authority officers to help you improve things further. There is more to do to improve the rewards set for good attendance. You are keen to involve pupils in this. Designated governors are also involved in the school's work to improve pupils' attendance. Despite your efforts, attendance remains low. This has been hampered by a recent outbreak of norovirus, which saw higher absence rates. However, you recognise the need to have greater oversight of those pupils whose attendance sits above 90%, but falls below the national average. You know this aspect of your absence procedures needs strengthening. That said, procedures are now in place to help you. This is an improvement from the time of the last inspection.

Governors are challenging you more. Recent governing body minutes reflect this. New appointments to both chair and vice-chair have invigorated governance. They are committed to supporting you to make improvements, while demanding greater urgency for improvements to take hold. They are keen to improve their own skills, and have instigated a second review of governance. This is due to take place in the spring term.

The quality of teaching and learning is showing signs of improvement. Weaker teaching is being addressed. Curriculum planning is much improved. Subject leaders are clear where strengths lie and what needs to improve further. Their action plans reflect this. They are alert to any remaining gaps in pupils' knowledge, which is the legacy of weaker curriculum planning. However, subject leaders do not always receive the time needed to monitor the implementation of their curriculum plans, as robustly as they need to, to iron out any remaining variations in teachers' practice quickly.

There has been a three-year improvement in pupils' reading attainment at the end of key stage 2. This is now broadly in line with the national average. This year you have introduced a new approach to guided reading. Pupils now study a range of quality texts as a class. Each text requires pupils to use their skills of recall, inference and comprehension. Curriculum planning maps out when the key skills will be taught, but needs greater precision. A review of pupils' workbooks showed consistency of approach between classes. It also identified a need to improve pupils' skills to form explanations.

Over time, pupils' outcomes in the Year 1 phonics screening check are in line with national averages. There had been some variation in the use of resources, which had crept into teachers' practice. To end this, a new phonics scheme and resources have been introduced. The order and speed with which new sounds are now being taught is clear. There is a strong focus on pupils using their phonics knowledge to spell. There was consistency of this aspect in the phonics sessions visited. There was, however, less emphasis on pupils saying the sounds. The subject leader acknowledges she has yet to monitor the new approach.

Improvements to the library mean that there is a new stock of books for pupils to borrow. Pupils say how much they love the library in their new school. They talked about how much they enjoy taking books home each week. This is improving their love of reading. Pupil librarians take their role seriously. They know how to file library books and how to recommend good reads. Books used for pupils to practise their reading, are well matched to their phonics knowledge. The subject leader explained that some pupils do not take books home with them. She recognises that this is time lost when pupils could be practising their reading.

The mathematics subject leader has recently returned to school. She has produced detailed curriculum maps for each year group. They sequence the essential knowledge and skills for each mathematical concept. This helps to build pupils' mathematical understanding progressively. Curriculum maps show prior and post learning. This helps teachers see learning as a continuum. It also helps them to plan activities to match pupils' needs. Lesson visits showed that this is beginning to come through. The subject leader has rightly identified gaps in pupils' mental arithmetic skills. She has produced a mental arithmetic scheme to supplement existing plans. This is still to be implemented.

Your science leader is recently appointed. She has completed an audit of the quality of education in science across the school. Her action plan makes clear the priorities needed for improvement. She has provided and procured some training, but knows there is a need for more. She has improved curriculum planning. Teachers know what needs to be taught and when. Her monitoring identified weaknesses in pupils' skills to work scientifically. She is yet to follow this up.

External support

You are receiving continued and extensive support from the local authority. Regular reviews are helping to identify where improvements are being made, and to keep you focused on what is still to improve.

This year, you are receiving support from the Department for Education's National Leaders of Education programme.

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

Yours sincerely

Diane Buckle
Her Majesty's Inspector