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Dear Mr Kavanagh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Broom Cottages Primary & Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 17 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:

- sharpen the focus of monitoring activity so that leaders spend less time checking compliance and more time evaluating the quality of education
- ensure that improvement plans clearly set out which members of staff are leading on each action, including contingency plans for staff absence
- ensure that governors have a clearly identified and timely role in checking the resourcing and impact of leaders' work
- further develop the monitoring role of subject leaders, ensuring that they are well trained and have the skills they need to check on the quality of the curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection I met the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the

school business manager. I was unable to meet the English and mathematics subject leaders as they were both absent from school. I met four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation and improvement documents were evaluated, along with a range of other documentation, including records of monitoring and external support.

Pupils were enjoying their end-of-term Christmas parties and concerts, so we were unable to visit lessons. I heard pupils read and spoke to pupils about their learning. I studied documents including the report written by local authority officers following their most recent evaluation of leaders' work, and minutes of meetings of the governing body. Working alongside the deputy headteacher, I evaluated pupils' learning in their mathematics books and reading records.

Main findings

Inspectors commented positively on the effectiveness of the teaching of phonics at the time of the last inspection. Nevertheless, leaders have not been complacent. They have made further improvements. Leaders identified that teachers sometimes gave key stage 1 pupils reading books that were too difficult. These books included letters and sounds that pupils did not know. There were not enough reading books to choose from that were well matched to the school's phonics programme. Leaders acted on these observations and have invested in lots of new reading books and additional staff training. There are now plenty of suitable books. As a result, pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 are growing in confidence, pleasure and fluency in their reading.

Leaders are keen to ensure that they build on this success in key stage 1 with improvements to the reading curriculum at key stage 2. They know that the standard that Year 6 pupils achieved in the 2019 reading test was not good enough. Leaders are determined that this will not happen again. Leaders have invested in new reading resources for key stage 2 pupils. They have changed the way that reading is taught. Teachers now focus on improving pupils' reading skills and extending their vocabulary. Pupils are eager to read every day. They record comments about what they have read and complete reading challenges. Many parents hear their children read at home daily. Pupils are keen to improve their personal scores when they take reading comprehension tests online in school. Governors have invested in improving wi-fi accessibility to make online reading easier for pupils in all classes. Pupils are rightly proud when their achievements in reading are celebrated in assembly.

The mathematics curriculum has been embedded since the last inspection. Leaders work closely with the local mathematics hub and then share this training with all staff. This is improving staff subject knowledge. Teachers are following the sequence of the carefully planned mathematics curriculum. However, there is still some inconsistency with some teachers moving too slowly. Pupils show their

understanding, but teachers repeat the same work unnecessarily. This means that some pupils have not completed all the learning that was planned for the autumn term yet. They have not moved on to the more difficult reasoning and problem-solving work that came towards the end of the plan. Leaders have not monitored mathematics since September, so no one noticed this.

The school improvement plan is not specific enough about who is doing what and when. If leaders had included monitoring the mathematics curriculum as an action this half term, it might not have been forgotten. Leaders have not made adequate contingency plans to ensure that monitoring continues when staff are absent. The school improvement plan does not say which governor, or group of governors, is checking on each area for improvement. Governors have not challenged leaders well enough about the difference their monitoring is making to the quality of education.

Leaders have made good progress in improving teachers' subject knowledge across the wider curriculum. The local authority has supported subject leaders with this work. Leaders have thought carefully about the sequence of learning in each subject. New curriculum plans have been introduced in geography, history and science. Leaders have thought carefully about how they can include assessment of pupils' learning within these plans.

Although leaders are taking effective action, some barriers are holding their progress back. Lots of pupils miss school far too often. This means that they are missing out on the new reading resources and improvements to the curriculum. They are falling behind their peers who are in school and learning. Leaders are trying lots of different things to improve pupils' attendance, but the impact of this work is limited.

The rate of unavoidable teacher absence is also very high. It is more than double the national average. This means that some teachers are missing out on training opportunities. The deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) lose their leadership and management time because they step in to teach classes when teachers are off school long-term. Leaders and governors must ensure that essential leadership activity, such as the monitoring of the impact of the curriculum, still happens.

External support

Leaders are effectively drawing on the external support that they need. An external review of governance was undertaken following the last inspection. The external reviewer identified gaps in governors' skills. Governors have undertaken a skills audit since then to see whether gaps remain. Governors are improving their skills by attending specialist training for governors.

The two recently appointed phonics leaders are working closely with an adviser from the company that provides the school's preferred phonics programme. This adviser also leads staff meetings to ensure that staff subject knowledge in phonics

is secure. In 2019, pupils achieved results in the Year 1 phonics screening check and Year 2 statutory reading test that were broadly in line with the national standard.

The mathematics subject leader has worked with the local mathematics hub. The curriculum for mathematics has improved. In 2019, the standard that Year 2 pupils achieved in the statutory mathematics test was above the national average.

The local authority has provided effective support for subject leaders. This has helped them to redesign the wider curriculum. The local authority has also increased the level of challenge. They invite senior leaders to additional meetings to review the progress that they are making. The chair of the governing body is invited to attend these meetings. This is helping to improve his knowledge and skills, and is increasing the level of challenge he is able to provide.

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

Yours sincerely

Tracey Ralph
Her Majesty's Inspector