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Mrs Laura Snow
Principal
Strand Primary Academy
Strand Street
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Dear Mrs Snow

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Strand Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 three 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 the curriculum for phonics is implemented securely and consistently so that all pupils are able to read with fluency as soon as they should
- make sure that pupils who are struggling to learn to read receive a planned programme of extra practice to help them catch up quickly
- consider how to make more effective use of ongoing assessment to check that pupils have remembered important knowledge in the subjects they study.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with: the principal and associate executive principal; the reading leader; the deputy chief executive officer; the chair

and vice-chair of the academy advisory board; a group of pupils; and a selection of staff. Meetings centred around the actions taken since the last inspection. Visits to lessons were undertaken jointly with school leaders. Discussions took place with some parents at the end of the school day. The school's improvement plans were also evaluated.

Context

The acting principal has been in post since February 2019, having previously been the assistant principal. The previous early years leader has now become the acting assistant principal. The associate executive principal works in the school for two days a week and a director of learning for one day a week.

Main findings

Pupils' progress and attainment by the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics are showing continued improvement since the last inspection. However, the proportion of pupils who met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check remained in the lowest 20% nationally in 2019. Leaders know this is their greatest priority. They have taken action to raise the profile of reading and are addressing the teaching of phonics. Following the last inspection, a new reading leader is now in post and the school's phonics programme has been relaunched. This has involved all staff being trained in the school's approach. It has resulted in more consistency from class to class and year group to year group. Staff said that it has given them greater confidence in teaching phonics and has provided them with a range of strategies to use. They can see that pupils are grasping their phonics knowledge more quickly than before. However, staff are at the early stages of embedding the new approaches. Activities sometimes do not offer pupils as much practice as they need, for example in blending sounds to read words. There are also missed opportunities to focus on pupils using an appropriate pen grip and the correct letter formation. Leaders now need to make sure that the approach is being implemented well so that it is consistently effective.

New starters to the school receive book bags containing a traditional tale and a nursery rhyme book, along with some phonics resources. This is helping parents to see the priority the school places on reading. It is enabling them to support reading at home. Leaders make sure that in the early stages of learning to read, pupils take home a book which is matched to their phonics knowledge. This helps them to read it with accuracy and growing confidence. Pupils who are behind with their reading have been identified as priority readers to read on a 1:1 basis with an adult. However, this does not happen as often as leaders think it does. These pupils would benefit from reading more regularly with an adult so that they develop reading fluency as soon as possible. Leaders need to formalise this part of the reading curriculum and check that it is happening and having the desired effect.

Leaders make sure that teachers read to pupils every day. The trust's reading

strategy is introducing pupils to a range of high-quality texts and authors. This is helping pupils to encounter and understand more words, people and worlds in their reading. Staff make sure that attention is drawn to new vocabulary. The wider curriculum is also being used to give pupils the background knowledge they need to understand more of the reading material they come across. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the books they have read in class. However, in key stage 2, there are too many pupils who are not reading with age-appropriate fluency. They find it difficult to understand what they read. For example, some struggle to take account of the punctuation to help them make sense of the text. Some of the books that are at the right stage for them are not of the right interest level for their age. It means they do not want to read them regularly. Leaders are aware of this and have ordered more books with an appropriate interest level. Pupils in key stage 2 who are not reading with enough fluency need additional reading practice to help them catch up quickly.

Leaders have made sure that pupils study the full range of subjects in the national curriculum. They are keen for oracy to underpin the school's curriculum. This is to address any disadvantage which pupils may face. This approach is in its early stages. Staff have received three days of training and are starting to put in place the strategies. During lesson visits, pupils in Year 6 were responding well to this. They were confident to perform in front of their peers. They received useful feedback from them. Leaders also make sure that the curriculum is used well to broaden pupils' experiences and give them opportunities they would not otherwise have. Leaders are reviewing the curriculum for each subject, a few subjects at a time, to make sure that plans are sequenced so that pupils can build well on their prior learning. For example, in history pupils study the Great Fire of London in key stage 1. They use this background knowledge to support their understanding when reading the book 'Black Powder' in key stage 2. However, where important knowledge has not been identified as clearly, pupils find it difficult to remember what they have learned in their topic. Leaders are aware that there is more to do to make sure that critical knowledge is identified at the planning stage. This will help teachers to recap and revisit key learning to check that pupils have secured their understanding of important concepts they will need for future learning.

Leaders have worked effectively with families to highlight the importance of good attendance and behaviour. Fewer pupils are absent or persistently absent. The amount of fixed-term exclusions has also reduced, with none so far this academic year.

Leaders have made sure that their plans for improvement focus precisely on the aspects which have been identified as in need of improvement. There are some well-established systems in place which enable leaders to check the impact of their actions and be held to account by governors and other colleagues in the trust.

External support

The trust has managed the changes to leadership well so that continuity and consistency has not been compromised. Middle leadership development is resulting in greater in-school expertise so that there is less reliance on external support. Staff have benefited from the range of training opportunities available through the trust such as with phonics and the oracy programme.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for North East Lincolnshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector