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Mrs Rachel Purvis
William Rhodes Primary School
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Dear Mrs Purvis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Rhodes Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 January 2020, 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 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 the work planned by leaders to review the phonics programme and make sure that staff have the expertise they need to teach phonics consistently well is carried out so that pupils become fluent readers
- ensure that teachers in all classes and subjects plan sequences of learning that build on pupils' previous learning
- more sharply focus their improvement plans to hold leaders and staff better to account and check that their initiatives are applied consistently well by all staff.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, including the leader for the early years and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), curriculum leaders and members of the governing body, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority and with parents at the start of the school day. He met formally with a group of pupils. Lessons were visited in all classes jointly with the headteacher. A scrutiny of pupils' work was undertaken with leaders and the school's most recent published data was considered. School improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, many curriculum leaders are new to their role. Leaders and the governing body have also made some changes to the structure of the school timetable to ensure financial sustainability.

Main findings

Leaders are taking a range of actions to improve the school since the previous inspection. They have managed financial challenges and a period of staff absences well. Leaders, staff and governors who spoke with the inspector are proud to be part of the school. They are ambitious for what pupils can achieve. Pupils themselves say that the school is improving. While there is still work to do, leaders are taking the necessary steps to improve the school.

Leaders are effectively tackling the priorities identified for the early years at the previous inspection. The leader for the early years has a clear oversight of provision and checks children's progress carefully. This information is used to plan learning that is based on the children's needs, in both the Nursery and Reception classes. Leaders are improving partnership and engagement with parents. Parents are welcomed into classrooms at the beginning of each day. Leaders hold meetings with parents when they join the school to understand children's needs better. Parents are invited to events such as visits to a library, family creative activities and the recent, well-attended, phonics workshop.

Leadership of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has also improved since the last inspection. The SENCo identifies pupils' needs carefully and puts appropriate support in place. The leader checks the impact of this support carefully and provides support and training for staff to improve teaching and the curriculum for pupils with SEND. The SENCo has a clear vision for how the provision will be developed further. Pupils' work shows that many pupils with SEND are achieving well.

Many subject leaders are new to their roles and are receiving appropriate support and training. They are becoming increasingly effective in bringing about improvements. Leaders are taking effective action to improve the curriculum and teaching of mathematics. Teachers generally use a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics. They teach pupils to be fluent in the most important knowledge in mathematics. Pupils are positive about the daily mathematics warm-ups. Teachers often use visual imagery and apparatus effectively to help pupils understand mathematical concepts. They have focused on teaching pupils different calculation methods. These are often taught in a well thought out and sequenced way which means that pupils understand the methods they are using.

Leaders and other staff are improving pupils' reading comprehension skills and understanding of vocabulary. Leaders have introduced a range of initiatives which are having a positive impact. Teachers encourage pupils to know how reading can make a difference to their work. Pupils who spoke with the inspector have positive attitudes to reading. Pupils generally take pride in their work. However, sometimes staff still do not have high enough expectations of the quality of pupils' handwriting.

Published results show that pupils are not achieving well enough in phonics. Leaders have focused on improving the teaching of phonics and early reading. Leaders and staff have identified that some older pupils have gaps in their knowledge of phonics. Leaders provide focused support to address this. They have plans to review the phonics programme and ensure that teaching is consistently strong. It is vital that this work is undertaken so that pupils are able to decode and read fluently from the start.

Teachers sometimes provide pupils with opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. For example, in key stage 2 science, pupils applied their mathematical knowledge to draw line graphs and use their non-fiction writing skills to write up an investigation. However, this is inconsistent. Leaders are in the process of reviewing how the curriculum is planned in different subjects. The quality of pupils' work in the foundation subjects is variable. Teaching sequences are sometimes not as well planned in some subjects as they are in English and mathematics.

Historically, pupils' attendance has been low. This was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Leaders are taking an appropriate range of actions to promote the importance of regular attendance. Leaders make clear their procedures to parents for following up absences, and work closely with families of pupils who are regularly absent from school. This often helps to improve the attendance of individual pupils. Leaders are aware that improving attendance continues to be a priority.

Since the last inspection, the governing body has benefited from the ongoing support from a national leader for governance. The governing body has changed its structure and received relevant training. Governors understand their roles and

responsibilities. The minutes of their meetings show they ask challenging questions of leaders about different aspects of the school's work. Governors were able to see for themselves the impact of funding for physical education by visiting the school.

Leaders and governors are aware of remaining inconsistencies and the school's priorities for continuing improvement. However, their improvement plans do not make clear enough the changes they wish to see. Linked to this, leaders and governors have not planned carefully enough key actions across the school year to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work. Consequently, they are not as effective as they could be in holding leaders and staff to account.

External support

The local authority provides effective support for improvements to leadership and the quality of teaching. Leaders and staff have benefited from external expertise including the support of specialist leaders in education. This support was brokered by the DfE national leader for education, who is also the local authority advisor supporting the school.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lawson
Her Majesty's Inspector