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Mrs Alyson Walsh
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Dear Mrs Walsh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Radcliffe Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 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 two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and trustees are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that attainment in reading and mathematics at the end of key stage 2 improves to become closer to the national average
- embed an appropriate level of demand in pupils' work in mathematics more consistently across all year groups
- bring the school's website up to date with all required information and ensure that it remains so.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, the executive headteacher, senior leaders and various members of staff. I also met with a group of pupils from all year groups and talked informally throughout the day with other pupils. I met with the chair of trustees and the chair of the local governing board. I met with the headteacher from another school in the trust, who is providing support. I examined a variety of documentation, including the school's improvement plan, its self-evaluation document, minutes of meetings related to governance and documents connected with safeguarding. You and I carried out a series of joint visits to classrooms to look at pupils' work in English and mathematics. I also looked at a selection of pupils' books from Years 1 to 6.

Context

Since the last inspection, there have been some changes to the leadership of the school. The trustees appointed you as headteacher with effect from 1 September 2019. They also replaced the previous executive headteacher with an interim executive headteacher, starting at the same time. The senior leadership team has been restructured. Two of three assistant headteachers have left the school and there has been a restructuring of teaching and learning responsibility allowances. The new senior leadership team consists of you, the executive headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the remaining assistant headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator.

Main findings

You and other leaders have an appropriate plan of action to address the areas for improvement that inspectors identified at the previous inspection. In the main, it is sufficiently detailed and includes evaluations of your work. There is clear evidence that this plan is helping to bring about the required changes.

You have built on the improvement plan that was in place before your arrival. You have included reading in your plan since September 2019. This was because attainment at the end of key stage 2 was low, although progress showed improvement.

The plan would benefit from some more precision in places. Sometimes, for example, there are fewer specific actions that explain how you are improving the delivery of the curriculum and more that describe how you will check teachers' work.

You have brought in the headteacher of the other school in the trust to give support to staff who need it. This contributes well to the improving quality of education that is emerging.

You have improved the use of the outdoor area in the early years to ensure that pupils take part in purposeful activities. For example, while children play in the water trough, staff help them to count objects and carry out simple subtraction. There is a range of activities that contribute to developing children's knowledge and skills across the learning areas.

There was a strong improvement in pupils' progress in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 in 2019. However, attainment was significantly below the national average. You have taken steps since then to increase pupils' knowledge in mathematics. You provide regular training to staff to strengthen their subject knowledge. You make sure that teachers regularly check on pupils' understanding and address misconceptions promptly. This has contributed to an improving picture of how much pupils know and remember.

You have also developed the mathematics curriculum to ensure that teachers provide work that is suitably demanding for pupils. You have brought in additional resources to encourage, for example, the greater use of mathematical reasoning skills. However, there is some inconsistency in how demanding the work is for pupils in lower key stage 2, although this has started to improve.

Strategies that school leaders introduced to improve writing had a highly positive effect on progress by the end of Year 6 in 2019. You have introduced other strategies to continue to strengthen pupils' performance in writing, such as the use of high-quality reading texts to stimulate pupils' imagination. There are also more opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge about writing in other contexts, such as in their topic work.

Year 6 test results in 2019 showed above-average progress in reading, although attainment was significantly below the national average. Your strategies to address this include specific structured teaching of important reading skills, such as retrieving information and inference. You have organised the learning to enable pupils to acquire the knowledge they need in a logical order. Evidence that I saw indicated that pupils are starting to build their reading knowledge effectively.

Test results at the end of key stage 2 in 2019 showed that disadvantaged pupils made similar progress to other pupils. You have, however, increased your focus on this group. You make sure that all staff have a clear understanding of the needs of the disadvantaged pupils in their class. You use pupil premium funding appropriately to provide support as required. For example, you run extra reading sessions for those who need them and allow free access to the school's breakfast club to encourage better punctuality and attendance.

Your strategies to improve attendance are starting to have a positive effect. Your attendance team more actively challenges parents or carers of pupils who are absent from school. As soon as there is an unexplained absence, parents receive a telephone call to check why their child is not present. Leaders carry out checks on

attendance every half-term and write letters to parents of poor attenders to insist that they make sure that their child comes to school. You also reward good attendance in school, with celebrations and certificates for pupils. As a result, pupils' attendance is currently closer to the national average than at the last inspection. The rate of persistent absence is below average.

Prejudicial name-calling and behaviour are now dealt with promptly. You keep detailed records that show your responses to any incidents. Pupils who spoke with me said that behaviour has greatly improved since your arrival. They are confident in the way teachers manage any incidents.

You have improved pupils' lunchtime experience by commissioning a sports coach to provide activities for them. This has contributed to the mainly calm atmosphere that I experienced during my visit.

There was a high number of fixed-term exclusions in the autumn term this year. This is because you have taken a tougher line on serious poor behaviour since September. The documentation I examined showed that you followed the correct procedure and the incidents were serious enough to warrant exclusion as a last resort.

You arranged for a review of the school's use of the pupil premium. The school has started to put the report's recommendations into action but this is not fully in place. Evidence in minutes of meetings shows that trustees and governors ask more frequent questions about how effectively funding is being used.

Leaders have strengthened their checks on the quality of education that the school provides. There is a 'monitoring and training calendar' in place. Activities include scrutinising work in reading and writing and providing training in mathematics.

There have been some changes in leadership in recent months. You have begun to rearrange subject leadership so that there is a better match between staff's skills and the subject they lead. This contributes to the improvements in learning that are taking place. You also plan to develop a coaching programme to enhance subject leaders' skills further.

Staff morale is high. They feel that senior leaders are approachable and that you value staff and their work. Those who spoke with me stated that there has been an improvement in pupils' behaviour.

Safeguarding is effective. Staff are knowledgeable about how to keep pupils safe. They have received appropriate training and know how to respond if they have a concern about a child. You keep thorough records and you take prompt appropriate action when required. Pupils who spoke with me said that they feel safe in school. They know that adults will help them if they have any concerns.

My evaluation of the school's website and the trust's website showed that there are several omissions. These relate to publishing required information about: performance data; the curriculum; the use of pupil premium and funding for sports; admissions; provision for pupils with special educational need and/or disabilities; and documents related to the trust. Leaders have taken action to make the necessary changes as soon as possible.

External support

The school does not currently make use of external support. Leaders have applied for support from the Department for Education to secure a national leader of education, along with associated funding, to help the leadership team to identify and implement further improvements within the school.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bury. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Quinn

Her Majesty's Inspector