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Mrs Fay Walton
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Walton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whaley Bridge Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the new curriculum is implemented effectively so that teachers plan sequences of learning in all subjects that build on pupils' previous learning
- ensure that the revised assessment policy is implemented consistently across the school in all subjects, and checks on what pupils learn and recall are used to inform the next steps in their learning
- ensure that the curriculum enables more pupils to attain the higher level in mathematics.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), curriculum leaders responsible for mathematics, science, history and geography, members of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, along with a range of other documentation. This included the school's single central record, the school's most recent published performance data and curriculum plans. The inspector scrutinised a number of pupils' workbooks. Visits to all classes were undertaken jointly with the headteacher.

Context

Since the last inspection, two members of staff have left the school and two are currently on temporary leave. Two new teachers have been appointed to the school. Many curriculum leaders are new to their role.

Main findings

Senior leaders have introduced a more structured and systematic approach to leadership functions since the last inspection. These are focused on making more frequent and focused checks on the quality of education across the school so that leaders are able to identify and address any weaknesses.

Subject and key stage leaders have been given training and development opportunities that have increased their knowledge and skills to monitor their areas of responsibility. This has enabled them to evaluate the quality of education that is being provided. This is helping them to diagnose where improvements are required.

They report their findings directly to senior leaders and members of the governing body. This means that those responsible for strategic and operational leadership of the school can pinpoint the actions they need to take to improve. These actions are recorded in the school improvement plan, which sets out clearly the order in which leaders intend to tackle weaknesses, what leaders intend the improvement to look like and what the impact will be in terms of pupils' achievement once the changes have been made. This has enabled governors to hold senior leaders to account for the rate of implementation of the plan and the extent to which this is making a difference to the quality of education that pupils receive. The plans are refined and reviewed in light of the checks that leaders are making.

The actions that senior leaders are taking are leading to improvement. For instance, the changes to the ways in which staff check on how well pupils are learning have been implemented more consistently across the school. Adults ask more frequent and probing questions of pupils, particularly during lessons in English and mathematics. They check that pupils understand, and explain further when they do

not. Teachers make sure that the tasks that pupils are doing are appropriately demanding. Teachers plan activities in English and mathematics that help pupils to build on their previous learning. This is helping pupils to know more and remember more. Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stages 1 and 2 is improving.

Leaders introduced a new curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 in January 2020. The aim is for the curriculum to be as ambitious in breadth and depth as the national curriculum but to also be bespoke for the pupils at Whaley Bridge. Leaders want pupils to acquire knowledge and appreciation of local history and geography, as well as developing an understanding of the world beyond their locality. The curriculum is mapped out on a long-term plan and has been shared with parents and carers. Senior leaders know that this curriculum is at an early stage of implementation. High on their priority list is the need to ensure that learning is sequenced appropriately so that it builds on pupils' prior knowledge.

Leaders have changed the approach to assessing pupils' learning in subjects other than English and mathematics. They check the extent to which pupils can recall knowledge and demonstrate skills from previous study. This is at an early stage of implementation. Subject leaders know that they need to make more frequent checks on what pupils have learned when they monitor the impact of the new curriculum on pupils' achievement.

The mathematics leader has revised the way in which mathematics is taught. Leaders have shared the new approach with parents. This is helping parents to support their child's learning at home. Pupils practise their times tables and number facts daily, both mentally and when solving problems using a written method. This is helping them to become more fluent in being able to calculate accurately. The curriculum is sequenced carefully to enable pupils to develop their skills in calculating and to develop their understanding of place value. Staff implement the revised calculation policy consistently across the school. Despite these improvements, at this stage, not enough pupils attain the higher levels of achievement in mathematics by the time they leave the school. They do not have enough opportunities to apply their learning to solve problems that require a deep understanding of different aspects of mathematics.

The SENCo keeps a close overview of the provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in the main part of the school and in the enhanced unit. The school has an inclusive ethos and each child with SEND is known well to all staff. These pupils are supported effectively in the main part of the school, both during lessons and when they receive individual additional support. This is particularly noticeable in mathematics. Teachers use a range of resources and visual imagery to help this group of pupils understand mathematical concepts. There are bespoke learning programmes for the pupils who attend the enhanced unit. These are being implemented effectively.

Staff have visited other schools as part of their professional development. This has helped them to develop their practice and deepen their understanding of effective approaches to the teaching of different subjects. They are motivated to improve their practice.

Senior leaders have streamlined many of the school's systems for reporting and recording information. Teachers appreciate that this gives them more time to plan purposeful learning activities for pupils.

Staff say that, while there is still a lot to do, morale is high and everyone connected with the school is fully committed to securing improvements.

External support

Senior leaders and members of the governing body agree that the local authority is providing effective support to the school. Local authority officers understand the school's strengths and areas where further improvement is required. They provide clear guidance and advice to strengthen and distribute leadership across the school. This is helping to improve the quality of education that is being provided.

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

David Carter

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector