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Caroline Howarth
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Howarth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Field Lane Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 June 2021, 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(2) 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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. I discussed the impact of the pandemic with you and have taken that into account in my evaluation.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- refine its school development plans to include precise and clear actions
- maintain staff training in delivering systematic synthetic phonics so that all pupils can get off to a prompt start and sustain their progress in being confident readers.

Context

Shortly after the previous section 5 inspection, the previous headteacher left the school. You became the substantive headteacher in January 2020, having moved from within the Brighter Futures multi-academy trust. Two governors have recently joined the governing body. In the near future, it is expected that the school will transition to become part of a newly formed multi-academy trust.

Main findings

Leaders have been focused. You have a clear vision and are determined that all pupils, despite any adversity, can succeed. Leaders have prioritised the areas for improvement from the previous section 5 inspection. They have correctly undertaken other areas of work, including a review of governance and the development of leaders at all levels. Training has been a priority for all staff. This, and the vision of leaders, has moved the school forward. However, leaders' action plans, including those relating to leadership and management, are not sufficiently precise. These need to be refined to match your ambitious plans.

Governance has improved. Governors now ensure that there is no complacency. They are consistent in their questioning to check leaders' assertions. One governor said, 'We don't make assumptions, we seek assurances; if in doubt, we seek alternative evidence.' Governors are eager to have this scrutiny recorded in their records of meetings. Governors receive regular information from leaders in school. At times, this is ambiguous. Leaders' information for governors is not consistently plain and clearly understood. However, leaders have taken recent steps to improve the clarity and accessibility of their reports for governors. This is starting to make a positive difference.

There is every intention to inspire a lifelong love of reading among pupils. You have invested heavily in a range of new reading materials, including some phonetically decodable books. You have also purchased books to enhance the curriculum and to improve pupils' exposure to high-quality texts. Staff set aside extra time to help pupils at risk of falling behind in their reading. Pupils read books that are matched to their phonics knowledge. Leaders check regularly to assure themselves of this match. Development planning for improving the teaching of phonics and early reading, however, is currently too vague. It is being reworked with the support of a local multi-academy trust to match the needs of Field Lane Primary School.

Most staff who teach early reading and phonics have the expertise and knowledge required to do so effectively. Ongoing professional development and coaching feature regularly. A minority of staff have not had the opportunity to train on the school's approach to the systematic teaching of synthetic phonics. Leaders are in the process of making sure all teaching staff are trained. This will ensure that all pupils receive the same experience in terms of quality.

Teachers plan for the next steps in pupils' learning at the end of each lesson. Pupils understand these systems and respond well. For instance, pupils read their teachers' comments and make changes where appropriate. This carefully considered feedback helps pupils to develop their learning. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. Staff know pupils' needs and guide them effectively.

You commissioned external partners to carry out a behaviour audit. These inspectors noticed a calm and nurturing atmosphere around the school. Pupils are polite to adults; they interact well with one another and show respect. There is a clear and effective behaviour strategy. Pupils value rewards. They are eager to earn points and have plans to 'spend' these on both material and non-material items. For instance, one pupil told inspectors that he was saving points to become a teaching assistant for the day. Pupils behave well in school. This is evident in lessons, in the dining room and on the playing field during breaktimes.

Additional support

The trust has brokered a range of support for leaders. This includes support from the school improvement services of the local authority. The school will become a member of the Polaris multi-academy trust in the near future. Partners from this trust are currently supporting the school in developing leaders at all levels.

External support is well received, and leaders are open to additional challenge in developing the school. Support is carefully coordinated and used judiciously. This helps to ensure that the support is impactful and fit for purpose.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the executive headteacher, the chief executive officer of Polaris multi-academy trust, representatives of those responsible for governance and a representative of the local authority. In these meetings, we discussed the actions taken since the last inspection.

Together, we visited lessons. I met with you in your role as special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator, listened to pupils read with familiar adults and observed pupils' interaction at social times. I also looked at documents, such as the minutes of governors' meetings, a summary of your self-evaluation document and the school's development plan. Together with the chief operations officer, I looked at the schools' single central register.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the board of trustees, the chief executive officer or equivalent of the Brighter Futures multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Calderdale. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Marcus Newby
Her Majesty's Inspector