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30 March 2023

James Haywood
Headteacher (Acting)
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Dearne Street
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Dear Mr Haywood

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Sandhill Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 24 February 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and your deputy headteacher, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust and members of the interim executive board (IEB) the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited lessons where pupils were being taught phonics and lessons where pupils were learning mathematics. I held discussions with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour in school and their learning, reviewed curriculum documentation for geography and looked at pupils' workbooks, including those for geography and history. I met with a range of staff working in school, checked the school's single central record and spoke to parents at the end of the school day. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Sandhill Primary School continues to require improvement. Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.

Main findings

You were appointed as acting headteacher in September 2022, having previously served as deputy headteacher. Another colleague in school was appointed as acting deputy headteacher at this time. The trust intends to appoint a substantive headteacher to take up post in September 2023.

At the time of the last inspection, it was noted that leaders had focused on improving the teaching of reading, English and mathematics, and that this had been successful. However, while leaders had developed ambitious plans for other subjects, pupils were not achieving as well as they should in these subjects. Since the inspection in November 2021, you have continued to develop the curriculums in other subjects. You have ensured that your plans include precise detail of what pupils need to learn and when. This allows staff to focus their time on 'how', rather than 'what', to teach. Staff have received subject-specific training which enables them to make appropriate decisions as to the activities and resources to use with their classes. Combined, these approaches are supporting pupils to develop a depth of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum you have designed. For example, pupils were able to talk in depth, using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary, about the key features of rivers. They were able to talk about the key rivers in the UK, Europe and the world that were identified in your curriculum.

Because of the way your timetable is organised, with some subjects taught in termly 'blocks', there are a very small number of subjects where the subject-specific staff development has not led to subject-specific teaching approaches being embedded. There are, however, clear and well-thought-through plans for staff development in these areas in advance of teaching in the summer term.

You, and leaders at all levels in school, have focused attention on the things that will improve pupils' education. You have ensured that the actions taken will improve things 'in the long term', rather than looking for 'quick fixes' that will not last. You have ensured that all staff are fully on board with the changes being made. As one member of staff commented, 'I come into work every day knowing that I'll have to work hard, but I know what I have to do, why it is important, and how it will make a difference to pupils. There is no 'them and us' with leaders, just 'us'.

The IEB has secure knowledge of the strengths and areas of ongoing development of the school. The range of expertise of IEB members enables them to offer appropriate challenge and support to leaders. There are plans for the IEB to become a local governing body in September 2023.

You have received highly effective support from the Every Child Matters Academy Trust, both through challenge and support from the CEO and also through opportunities provided for schools across the trust to work closely together. For example, opportunities on trust-wide staff training days for subject leaders from different schools to work together have allowed subject leaders to share their knowledge and experience of

curriculum design. These close working relationships have supported swift, and high-quality, curriculum thinking and design.

At the time of the last inspection, behaviour was improving but pupils were not always focused on their learning in lessons. You have had a clear focus on rewarding positive behaviour and pupils' engagement in lessons. Pupils keenly collect 'points' for good behaviour and effort, which are then turned into star badges, which pupils wear with pride. Pupils' efforts are further rewarded in assemblies through 'star of the week' awards. Pupils are now consistently showing high levels of engagement in their learning. Behaviour in lessons and around school is calm. Your work in this area has been effective.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the IEB, the chair of the board of trustees, and the chief executive officer of the Every Child Matters Academy Trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Barnsley. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Wren
His Majesty's Inspector