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19 June 2023

Jonathan Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brown

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Medlock Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection of your school that took place on 4 May 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, other senior leaders, the local authority and those responsible for governance, 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 visited lessons, heard pupils read to a familiar adult, discussed curriculum improvements with subject leaders and met with a selection of pupils from different year groups. I also considered a range of school documentation including minutes of governing body meetings and leaders' documentation relating to safeguarding. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Medlock 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.

The school should take further action to:

- further embed the phonics and early reading programme and ensure that staff are secure in their subject knowledge to deliver the programme with confidence
- embed leaders' assessment systems in a small number of subjects to enable staff to accurately identify the gaps that pupils may have in earlier learning.

Main findings

You were appointed as headteacher shortly before the last graded inspection. Since your appointment, you have appointed a number of new teaching staff.

You and other leaders have designed a suitable plan of action to address the areas for improvement identified by inspectors at the previous graded inspection. Your improvement plan focuses accurately on the correct priorities required. Added to this, you have set clear milestones to help you to evaluate the progress that you and other leaders are making. There is secure evidence that you have already improved the quality of education that pupils receive, particularly in phonics and early reading.

You have implemented a new phonics programme to address the weaknesses identified in the delivery of the early reading curriculum. Teachers are now clearer about your higher expectations for pupils' achievement in reading. You have ensured that staff have received training to help them to deliver this programme well. Staff use assessment strategies skilfully to identify those pupils who need additional help to keep up in reading. These pupils receive appropriate support from well-trained staff to ensure that they can catch up quickly and keep pace with the scheme.

In the main, teachers deliver the phonics scheme with confidence. For instance, teachers are increasingly focused on using the assessment information to match accurately the books that pupils read to their phonics ability. This is helping pupils to decode more difficult words and read with increased fluency. However, some staff need further support to build their confidence in delivering some aspects of the programme. For example, from time to time, some staff select books that do not match closely enough the sounds that pupils have learned. This hampers these pupils' ability to read confidently and fluently as quickly as they should.

Following the previous inspection, you have supported subject leaders to refine the guidance that they provide to teachers about what pupils should be learning. As a result, staff are clearer on what they should be teaching and when this content should be delivered. For instance, leaders have considered what vocabulary will support pupils in their learning in different topics. This is helping staff to know those aspects of the curriculum to emphasise and revisit.

You have acted to ensure that leaders support teachers to use your assessment systems effectively. This is helping staff to identify those aspects of learning that pupils may have forgotten. For example, staff provide pupils with ample opportunities to revisit or recall important prior learning. This helps pupils to better remember earlier knowledge and make links with new learning. That said, in a small number of subjects, teachers are not as well equipped to identify the gaps in pupils' learning. In these subjects, this prevents some pupils from building securely on what they know already and developing a rich body of subject knowledge.

Governors have responded positively to the final area for improvement identified by inspectors at the previous inspection. Since then, the local authority commissioned an external review of governance. This has helped them to become more knowledgeable about leaders' priorities and more focused on their responsibilities.

Following on from the external review, when recruiting new governors, members of the governing body ensure that they identify the skills and expertise required to strengthen governance arrangements. As a result, collectively, governors now have the appropriate knowledge to hold leaders to account for the quality of education for pupils. Added to this, governors have also ensured that they receive clearer information from leaders about how well pupils are learning the curriculum.

Finally, members of the governing body have acted to ensure that they are kept up to date about the progress that leaders are making to develop and further refine the curriculum. This means that governors can ask increasingly probing questions about pupils' achievement across a broad range of subjects.

You said that you are making effective use of the external support that you have received since the previous inspection. For example, you have brokered support from a local teaching school that you believe has helped you to improve the design and delivery of the phonics and early reading curriculum. Added to this, the support that you have received from the local authority has meant that you are more informed about how to refine and adapt your improvement planning going forward.

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

Yours sincerely

Stuart Perkins
His Majesty's Inspector