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Dear Mr Hargreaves

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Rawtenstall Balladen Community Primary School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 3 November 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.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, I discussed with you and other senior leaders, staff, governors and the local authority the actions that you have taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also visited some lessons, listened to pupils read to staff and observed pupils playing outdoors at lunchtime. I reviewed some of the school's improvement plans and curriculum information. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

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:

- identify the key knowledge that pupils will be taught and ensure that curriculum content covers all aspects of the national curriculum fully.
- support staff to implement the school's policy on behaviour so that pupils are confident that pupils behave as well as they should.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, approximately half of the teachers and teaching assistants have left the school. Several new staff have joined. The role to coordinate special educational needs and/or disabilities is being provided temporarily by an external expert visiting the school. The deputy headteacher will leave the school at the end of December 2023, and the chair of governors resigned from their role last week. The school is taking action to arrange for the election of a new chairperson imminently.

Since the inspection in November 2021, the school has taken effective action to tackle the weaknesses in the curriculum design and delivery. For example, in some subjects other than English and mathematics, the school has used published schemes to help teachers know what key concepts and vocabulary to teach. Nevertheless, in some units of work, the school has not identified the small chunks of knowledge that pupils should gain by the end of each topic. At times, the curriculum content does not cover all aspects of the national curriculum. As a result, pupils do not learn all that they need to know.

The strengths in early reading noted at the previous inspection have been maintained and built on. For instance, staff in the Reception class help children to gain new knowledge while having great fun in phonics activities. The school is making effective use of the help provided by external experts to deepen staff's practice further in delivering the phonics programme. This means that pupils are becoming increasingly fluent and confident readers by the end of Year 2.

The changes to the curriculum did not have sufficient time to make an impact on pupils' achievement at the end of key stage 2 in the 2023 national tests and assessments. The unvalidated published data for key stage 2 shows that Year 6 pupils' attainment and progress were significantly below average. These pupils had too many gaps in their learning, compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, to reach the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The published data does not reflect the achievement of pupils currently in the school. These pupils, who have benefited from the curriculum for longer, are making increasingly steady gains in their learning. Even so, many older pupils continue to have gaps in their learning. The school is working productively with the local authority to ensure that pupils in upper key stage 2 catch up.

The school has started to improve the quality of subject leadership. It is building the confidence of individual leaders to check the delivery and impact of the curriculum by providing them with training and support. Governors review the school's work with

greater care and challenge. They make effective use of their skills and training, as well as the advice provided to them by the local authority, to challenge and support the school.

The school has acted appropriately to improve pupils' behaviour. Leaders now place a greater emphasis on pupils learning to respect one another. This approach is beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils and staff welcome the school's changed approach. Nevertheless, the school does not make sure that the standard of some pupils' behaviour is positive enough. This means that some pupils feel that other pupils sometimes disregard the school's expectations for their behaviour on the playground and cause unnecessary disagreements.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Vaughan
His Majesty's Inspector