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Darren Hooley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hooley

Requires improvement monitoring inspection of Ashbourne Hilltop Primary and Nursery School

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 30 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 and took place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous graded (section 5) inspections.

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 leaders, governors and a representative of the local authority, 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 reviewed your plans for improvement and a range of other documents relating to the curriculum, behaviour, and other key aspects of the school. I discussed the curriculum with you and a group of school leaders. I visited a sample of lessons and spoke with groups of pupils. I reviewed the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). I reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. 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:

- continue to refine all SEND documents, ensuring that these provide increasingly precise information for staff to support pupils in achieving as well as they could
- continue to develop the leadership of subjects so that all leaders have the expertise to monitor the implementation and impact of the curriculum.

Main findings

Since the last graded inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership. The mathematics and English subject leaders took up post in September. Furthermore, the early years leader and SENDCo are new to post. These changes to the school's leadership have increased the capacity to make the necessary improvements.

You and all of your leaders are ambitious for all pupils to achieve well and receive a good quality education. You have responded robustly to address the recommendations from the last inspection. The school has been supported by the local authority and external specialists for early years and SEND. You have made necessary changes in relation to the curriculum, the early years provision, subject leadership, and the provision for pupils with SEND.

In the early years, the environment supports curriculum implementation. You have focused on developing children's language and communication and are pleased with the developments so far. The curriculum is well-sequenced to ensure that it builds children's knowledge as they move through the early years into Year 1. You recognise that further refinements are necessary in order for the curriculum to be more bespoke to the needs of all children.

Subject leaders have received high-quality professional development. They have ownership of the subjects that they lead. Curriculum planning has been refined. The intent of the curriculum is well understood. Further support will help leaders to monitor the implementation and impact of the intended curriculum.

Leaders have completely revised and improved the school's provision for pupils with SEND. You have ensured that staff are well trained in identifying and supporting pupils' needs. Pupils with SEND learn alongside their peers. Not all pupils' support plans are sufficiently precise to help them achieve their best.

The governing body has an accurate understanding of the improvements required. They are proactive in visiting the school to check for themselves the pace of improvement. Working together with staff, the local authority, and governors, you have identified the right priorities for improvement. Your plans to address these are focused and achievable and are mindful of staff workload and well-being.

You have taken positive steps to improve pupils' behaviour during social times. There are high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Recent training has ensured a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils value the activities provided, such as den building and playing on the 'Hilltop beach'. They say that behaviour has improved over the last year.

Since the last inspection, you have sought external support for your work to improve the school. You value the professional guidance provided by the local authority, a local trust, and external specialists.

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 Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Norbury
His Majesty's Inspector