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Mrs Karen Hawkins
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Dear Mrs Hawkins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Trawden Forest Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 March 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils are able to gain the appropriate skills and knowledge in subjects other than English and mathematics through a broad, balanced and progressive curriculum
- increase the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher standards at the end of early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2
- make sure that teachers make effective use of lesson time and move pupils' learning on quickly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders,

middle leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection.

Together, you and I visited all the classrooms. I met with two groups of pupils, who shared their books with me and talked about their learning. I also looked at a range of documentation, including your action plans, external evaluations of the school's work and arrangements for performance management.

Context

A new chair and vice-chair of governors were appointed in November 2016. An additional two new governors have joined the governing body since the inspection. Three new teachers have joined the school. The special educational needs coordinator, who is also the Year 3 class teacher, is currently on maternity leave. This leadership role is being covered by the temporary Year 6 teacher. Two part-time teachers are covering the Year 3 class.

Main findings

Staffing turbulence thwarted your plans last year. Despite these initial setbacks, you have made good progress in tackling the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Since September, you have capitalised on the stable staffing. Your action plans are now well under way and already making a positive difference. All your staff understand the school's priorities and know their individual roles and responsibilities. Staff are in no doubt about the urgency with which improvements must be made. New members of staff have played their part, wasting no time in getting to grips with the job in hand. Consequently, current pupils are making stronger progress than previous cohorts from their different starting points.

Together, your new and established staff have made great strides in improving the quality of teaching across the school. Initially, you were heavily reliant on the support offered by the local authority to help you improve the quality of teaching. However, you are making good use of the expertise within your own team now. You have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of every teacher. You make sure that the training you put in place is carefully tailored to individual need. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about the coaching programme they have taken part in. Teachers told me how the opportunities to work together, for example jointly moderating pupils' books, have sharpened their practice. These activities are not only improving the quality of teaching across the school, but also helping staff to 'gel' as a team.

You have transformed the teaching of writing. Boys are enthused by the range of engaging topics your teachers are choosing to inspire their writing. Pupils find the more structured approach to teaching writing is making a positive difference. Pupils find the clear success criteria provided by their teachers very helpful. Older pupils are able to accurately self-evaluate their work and know what they need to do to improve. Boys and girls were proud to show me the improvements in their writing since September.

Your senior and middle leaders responsible for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have a deep understanding of how well these pupils are doing. These leaders are identifying more precisely the barriers to success for these pupils and making sure that additional support is tailored to pupils' individual needs. Closer tracking makes sure that any interventions make the positive difference you expect. These pupils are now catching up quickly to their peers with similar starting points.

You have invested in new reading books to ensure that your pupils have plenty of books to choose from. You make sure that pupils select books which match their reading ability and help parents to support reading at home. Pupils talked to me enthusiastically about the books they enjoy reading. However, we agree that there are missed opportunities to help pupils, particularly middle- and higher-ability pupils. You understand that teachers must do more to help these pupils improve their skills of inference and develop stamina. Moreover, not enough is being done by teachers to make sure that all pupils read books from a range of genres by different authors. You know that some of your pupils are not choosing books which will help them develop their skills as readers and writers.

Across the school, the progress pupils are making in mathematics is still variable. Too often, pupils are spending time completing tasks which are too easy. You recognise that teachers need to have rich and sophisticated problems ready to challenge the 'quick graspers'. This is key if more pupils are to achieve the higher standards at the end of early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. You have already taken action to improve the teaching of mathematics across the school. The local authority monitoring visit last week confirmed that the quality of mathematics teaching is improving but you understand that there is still room for improvement.

When we visited classrooms, we saw many pupils working independently. Your teachers make sure that pupils understand what is expected of them. You recognise that developing pupils' behaviours for learning is key to their success. You are developing plans to build on the 'characteristics of effective learning', which are a cornerstone of the early years foundation stage, as pupils progress through school. You have appointed a senior leader to be responsible for this aspect of your action plan.

You have made good use of both external and internal moderation of pupils' work to ensure that teachers are assessing pupils' learning accurately. You and your senior leaders check pupils' work, observe lessons and talk to pupils to make sure that you are well informed about how well pupils are getting on. Your frequent pupil progress meetings make sure that you have up-to-date information about pupils' performance in reading, writing and mathematics. You make sure that pupils are on track to meet end-of-year expectations, swiftly putting in place additional support for any pupils falling behind. You know exactly where pockets of underperformance remain in the school and are taking decisive action to remedy them.

Your own data shows that current pupils are making better progress since the start of this academic year. Across school, pupils are better prepared for the next stage of their education, whether moving from early years into key stage 1, key stage 1 into key stage 2, or from Year 6 on to high school. Pupils in Year 6 are making accelerated progress which is helping them to overcome historical underperformance.

Your new chair and vice-chair of governors have wasted no time in securing a robust understanding of the school. They recognise the importance of making sure that the governing body has the range of skills, knowledge and expertise needed to provide effective strategic leadership. Governors are highly ambitious for the school. They are assiduous in fulfilling their duties. They make sure that they provide the appropriate levels of challenge and support to help improve the school's performance.

You know that there is still much to do. First, you recognise that across the school your most-able pupils must achieve the high standards they are capable of. Next, for all of your pupils to fulfil their potential, you understand that not a moment must be wasted. Third, you are progressing your plans for pupils to have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. We agree that it was important to focus on securing pupils' basic skills initially, but now it is time to broaden the curriculum. This will also provide more varied opportunities for pupils to hone their reading, writing and mathematics skills and knowledge.

External support

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

Yours sincerely

Pippa Jackson Maitland
Her Majesty's Inspector