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Mrs Julie Broadbent
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Broadbent

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Frederick Gent School

Following my visit to your school on 15 December 2015, 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 June 2015. 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:

- sharpen up the school improvement plans by including key milestones, so that progress towards targets can be measured regularly
- ensure that improvement plans make specific reference to key underperforming subjects
- improve teachers' planning to support specific pupil groups who are underachieving, such as the most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the local authority's senior adviser. I visited a number of classrooms across the school with a deputy headteacher. In addition, I scrutinised a number of documents, including the school's improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the latest summary of pupils' achievement and learning plans. I also spoke with pupils and viewed their workbooks during the observations of teaching.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been a number of staffing changes. As a result of teachers leaving to take up posts elsewhere, there are additions to the teaching staff: a new head of drama, a new head of information technology, a special educational needs coordinator, a head of science and two English teachers. A new head of humanities has been appointed for April 2016, because the existing postholder relinquished his post of responsibility this term. New literacy and numeracy coordinators have been appointed. In addition, two parent governors have joined the governing body to replace resignations in the summer term. A local business leader and an experienced governor have also joined the governing body.

Main findings

You have quickly acted upon the key areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. You have high ambition for the school and have accurately identified the schools' strengths and areas for improvement. Your aspirations and high standards are communicated well by the senior leadership team. You and the governing body have made important strategic staffing decisions, which are strengthening leadership across the school. The school's improvement plans rightly give priority to high-quality teaching and learning. Teachers are well supported through regular and focused training and development opportunities. Opportunities for 'joint practice development' enable teachers to share good practice in the key areas for improvement.

Subject leaders are challenged and supported well through the line management structure and, where appropriate, middle leaders also receive external advice and guidance. The improvement plans clearly identify how, by whom and when actions will be monitored. However, the plans do not specify key milestones that would allow governors to measure progress towards them. By not including these, the governing body may not be able to hold leaders to account as well as it could. In addition, the improvement plan is not specific enough about which subject areas are underperforming and therefore require special focus. Leaders were extremely clear about the actions they would be taking to tackle these weak areas during discussions, but the actions are not set out explicitly in the strategic plan.

Teachers are improving their lesson planning. They are becoming more confident in using their assessments of pupils' work and other information about pupils' needs when planning learning tasks. However, teachers' planning does not always make explicit how specific underperforming groups are supported, for example the most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.

Teachers are improving the way they use teaching assistants in the classroom. Teaching assistants are being trained regularly by the new and effective special educational needs coordinator. In a short period of time, teaching assistants have improved their effectiveness in the classroom.

Not all teachers follow the school's marking and feedback policy as well as they should. Some departments, however, such as mathematics and science, have developed more consistent practice. Subject and senior leaders monitor this aspect of the school's work regularly. As a result of this regular focused monitoring, leaders have noticed an improvement in the quality of feedback to pupils more recently.

The newly appointed literacy and numeracy coordinators have provided activities for pupils during form time and specialist subject words are displayed in classrooms. Reading continues to be a key focus across the school. As a result of the introduction of an intensive reading strategy, pupils' reading skills and reading ages have improved markedly.

Leaders have had their greatest impact on behaviour and attendance. Newly appointed non-teaching pastoral assistants have improved the way the school engages with parents. As a result, fixed-term exclusions are reducing and attendance is improving, especially for those who are persistently absent. Pupils' behaviour and attendance are closely monitored and early support is provided when a pupil is at risk of being excluded. I observed very few incidents of off-task behaviour in the classroom and behaviour logs show a significant decrease in poor behaviour in lessons over the last two terms. Senior leaders and subject leaders monitor pupils' behaviour regularly.

Work to develop pupils' understanding of British values is under way. Pupils now have several opportunities to experience the democratic processes during pupil council elections and whole-class discussions. The personal, social and health education study programme explicitly identifies these opportunities. Teachers are due to undertake 'Prevent' training to help them to recognise signs of extremism and radicalisation.

The governing body is improving its effectiveness. The Chair of the Governing Body is knowledgeable and experienced about educational matters. He is acutely aware of the school's weaknesses and has contributed to the improved systems and structures of governance. The strategic committee and the standards committee regularly scrutinise the information given to governors by school leaders. Department leaders are held to account during standards meetings. Governors are

becoming increasingly more confident in interpreting pupils' achievement data. Their role in the improvement plan is more explicit than before, although they are not part of its development. Governors have been active in devising new ways to engage with parents. They have already held two 'parent surgeries', which have provided valuable opportunities for parents to feedback their views about the school.

External support

You assure the quality of external support well to ensure value for money. As a result, you and the governing body have selected and commissioned specific and effective advisory support for English and other subjects. The local authority provides regular support and reviews for the school and has helped to improve the skills of governors through training events. The school is a member of the North Midlands Partnership, a cluster of four schools, which has been helpful in sharing good practice, especially in areas such as raising the achievement of boys and the most able, and improving parental engagement.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Zarina Connolly
Her Majesty's Inspector