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Mr A Edmonds
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Dear Mr Edmonds

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Brannel School

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 2016, 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 October 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in October 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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

The school should take further action to ensure that:

- strategies used to support literacy teaching across the curriculum have the desired impact
- all pupils take pride in their work and improve the quality of presentation.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, pupils and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also had a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated

and a learning walk was conducted with a senior leader so that lessons could be observed and books scrutinised.

Context

Since the last inspection, you have appointed a new head of humanities, two newly qualified teachers for history and catering, an experienced science teacher and a new pastoral support worker. You have also created five new assistant head of house posts.

Main findings

You and other leaders are working hard to tackle areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. The school development plan outlines in detail the actions that the school is taking to improve the quality of teaching, behaviour and pupils' aspirations and communication skills. The focus upon impact is clear because milestones, lines of accountability and monitoring of progress are built into the plan.

You are able to forge ahead with the work described in the school development plan because you have created a culture of higher expectations in the school. This is having a positive influence upon pupils and staff, so that the quality of teaching and behaviour of pupils is steadily improving. Teachers are providing more interesting activities which engage pupils and prompt them to think more deeply. Lessons that I visited were characterised by warm relationships between pupils and teachers and well-organised planning that encourages pupils to work in different ways. You need to ensure, however, that the high expectations staff have of pupils in class are also reflected in the work that pupils produce. The presentation of some work needs to be improved.

Your work to ensure that pupils receive effective feedback from teachers to improve their work, in line with the school's policy, is paying off. Across subjects, a lively and dynamic learning dialogue is taking place between pupils and their teachers, both in lessons and pupils' work. This reflects your desire to ensure that feedback, whether it is written or verbal, is 'fresh', relevant and immediate, leading to greater impact.

You have also prioritised the development of pupils' communication skills and a co-ordinated approach to teaching these skills across subjects. Middle leaders are keen to point out that teachers across the curriculum have embraced this work. For instance, in science, one lesson a fortnight includes a focus upon literacy. Pupils reported that teachers across different subjects corrected spellings and they were aware of their literacy targets in different subjects. However, leaders need to monitor the impact of the various initiatives introduced to support this work to be sure that they are having a meaningful impact.

The behaviour of pupils is improving because of the higher expectations staff have of pupils. The behaviour policy is consistently applied so that pupils 'know where they stand'. School uniform is worn with pride, and pupils are considerate towards each other and staff during break and lunchtimes. Your determined efforts to reduce absence and to engage parents in this respect are working.

Your determined desire to raise aspirations has also informed the actions you have taken to better prepare pupils for their next steps once they leave Brannel. Pupils are now receiving good-quality advice and opportunities to learn about, and experience, the diverse world of work. The pupils that I spoke to were very clear about what they would like to do when they left school. Their ideas included going to university, playing sport professionally and working in forensic science, to name three. You are clear that the next stage of this work is to better secure the commitment of parents.

Your work to improve different aspects of the school's work is supported by leaders at all levels, including governors. Middle leaders spoke with enthusiasm about their role in leading improvements to teaching and learning. They feel trusted and empowered to work with teachers to develop greater rigour and consistency in matters such as homework and assessment. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's priorities for improvement. This is because you have shared information with them in an honest and transparent way. As a result, governors are able to offer you the right level of challenge alongside the support they provide. This relationship supports the implementation of the improvement plan and the rapid improvement that is taking place.

External support

The local authority has provided you and other leaders with helpful support. As a result of its recent review of your efforts to address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, the local authority has an accurate and detailed understanding of the school's progress.

You have also made it a priority to establish relationships with other schools, such as your desire to 'look outwards' and avoid insularity. Staff from the school have visited other schools to develop their practice because you believe it is important to learn from others.

You have worked closely with your school improvement partner to improve aspects of your work, in particular the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. This external review of the spending of the pupil premium grant was useful in highlighting the importance of finely tuning the targeting of funding for maximum impact. As a result, you have acted upon this advice and the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is rising.

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

Yours sincerely

Steve Smith
Her Majesty's Inspector