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Kay Walker
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Walker

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whaley Thorns Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 June 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.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher, two subject leaders, the chair of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your plans for improvement and considered your most recent information on pupils' progress and attainment. We conducted a tour of the school together and visited all classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, the governing body has been reconstituted and an external review of governance has been completed.

Main findings

Since the section 5 inspection, school leaders have not secured the improvements needed quickly enough to tackle the weaknesses and inconsistencies in teaching and learning. As a result, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching and very little that is of good quality.

You are using two separate school improvement plans. These do not provide a clear, strategic overview about what actions will take place to bring about change. They do not set out the precise actions which are to be taken, do not identify how success will be measured clearly enough and do not identify interim milestones to enable governors to check progress at regular intervals.

Teachers' expectations about how much work pupils should complete and at what level remain too low in many classes. Teachers' skills in using assessment information about pupils' learning are not developing quickly enough. Pupils are not being provided with work that builds on what they already know and understand. Consequently, most-able pupils are not being provided with sufficient challenge and those who find learning difficult are not receiving enough support. The work in pupils' books confirms that the work set for pupils does not always match their needs and capabilities. As a result, too many pupils are underachieving.

You have begun to raise the profile of subject leaders in English and mathematics. They are beginning to develop a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, they are not sufficiently involved in checking the quality of teaching and driving other improvements.

Your own checks on the quality of teaching are more frequent and you are providing staff with some helpful feedback on how to improve their practice. However, this is not having the required impact because teachers are not applying your guidance quickly enough in order to have a significant impact on pupils' learning. For example, pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work have not improved since the time of the previous inspection.

Improved systems to track pupils' attendance are now more rigorous. You are working more effectively with parents to help them understand the need for their children to attend regularly. Pupils are inspired to attend regularly by the rewards you have introduced. However, attendance remains below the national average.

Children in the early years are enjoying improved opportunities to explore new skills independently and learn through well-planned play. In the Nursery, there was great

excitement as the children discovered footprints left overnight by a giant. They retold the story of 'Jack and the beanstalk' in vivid detail and described the giant. The classroom area has been reorganised and improved. A new outdoor area has been created and is being thoughtfully developed. The early years leader is working continually and successfully to improve the provision and ensure that the children are given the best possible start to their education. As a result, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development this year has almost doubled.

Governors know the school well and understand the challenges it faces. However, they have not ensured that senior leaders have focused sufficiently on improving teaching. They know that they need to strengthen their monitoring arrangements to ensure that they can check on the school's work more effectively and increase their level of challenge to senior leaders.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils continue to meet current requirements. Pupils who I met reported that they are happy in school and feel safe.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has provided some well-targeted support for teachers and subject leaders. However, some of this support has not been built on effectively and as a result, there is little measurable impact. The local authority is not sufficiently challenging the headteacher on the impact of her leadership because visits by the school improvement adviser are not frequent enough.

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

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector