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Mrs Ruth Collyer
Acting Principal
Mount Pellon Primary Academy
Battinson Road
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West Yorkshire
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Dear Mrs Collyer

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Mount Pellon Primary Academy

Following my visit to your school on 4 April 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, the assistant principals with responsibility for English and mathematics, a member of the governing body and the director of primary academies for Northern Education Trust. I also met with the school's achievement partner and the specialist leaders of education (SLEs) who are providing support for leadership development and the early years respectively. The trust's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. I reviewed other documents, including safeguarding audits and documents relating to health and safety and children's welfare. We made a series of short visits to several classes in the early years, and key stages 1 and 2.

Context

There have been changes to leadership and staffing since the previous inspection. The principal has left the school and a new principal has been appointed to take up post from September 2017. Two teachers have left the school, a permanent post has replaced one, and temporary arrangements are in place to cover the other position. Internal adjustments to key stage 1 and key stage 2 phase leadership have increased capacity for assistant principals to focus their time on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The trustees from Northern Education Trust have effectively secured the impact and stability of leadership by providing well-targeted support for you, your staff and other leaders. This has ensured a sustained momentum of improvement. At the same time, along with governors, they have successfully appointed a substantive principal to take up post from September 2017. Effective human resources and finance support provided by the trust has enabled you to methodically address aspects of the school's improvement in these key areas. As a result, you and your leaders have been able to focus upon the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and improving pupils' outcomes.

The trust's statement of action comprehensively includes all of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report. Planned actions to address these areas are relevant and are set against measurable pupils' outcomes identified at the front of the statement. The school's plans follow much the same format, which makes for effective links between the plans and, as such, there is a shared view of how to drive improvement. Monthly evaluation points in the school's plans convey a sense of urgency to bring about the required improvements.

The trustees provide regular support and challenge to leaders on the progress of the school's plans. You also ensure that members of the governing body are well informed about the school's plans and that they receive regular updates about the impact of completed actions from the plan. Governors are starting to take a more active interest in the effectiveness of leaders' actions across a wider range of areas. This is beginning to place them in a better position to support and challenge leaders.

The support provided by the achievement partner is helping you to improve the senior leaders' skills for checking for improvements. As a result, systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching are improving and prompt action is in place to provide support where teaching is not yet strong enough. Regular meetings to check the impact of the school's plans are starting to show that most actions are being delivered within the planned timeframe, and any slippage is identified at any early point. However, you agree that in order to make the plan a working document, it would benefit from further work to identify improvements

made and next steps. This would add detail to the red, amber, green (RAG) rating, which identifies progress made against the actions in the plan.

Despite best efforts of leaders, the trustees and governors, it has not been possible to appoint a leader for the early years. Currently, you are in the process of advertising this post for the second time. However, in the interim, the trust has organised additional capacity to drive improvement through the work of two SLEs. This is beginning to bring about improvements across the early years, including the assessment of children's learning and approaches to recording these. The recent introduction of an online recording system is starting to help staff capture children's learning more effectively. This approach also provides the future opportunity for greater involvement of parents with their child's assessment information.

You and your staff, well supported by the SLEs, have identified areas to improve teaching of phonics and mathematics in the early years. Staff training in phonics is helping to develop a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics in Nursery and Reception. However, you recognise that further work is required to embed this work in the early years and to roll out this approach across key stage 1. There is now an increased focus on teaching mathematics in the early years. This has included increasing the time for adult-led mathematics teaching and increasing opportunities for children to choose activities to deepen their mathematical understanding.

Leaders and staff have promptly tackled the issues related to the assessment of risks and statutory welfare requirements in the early years. You have completed the necessary policy updates, health and safety checks and recording of welfare requirements for the early years. You have also taken steps to improve further safeguarding arrangements across the school. Additional leaders have received the required safeguarding training to enable more designated safeguarding leaders to be in place. Completion of regular safeguarding audits is helping you to check that safeguarding practice remains effective. Consequently, you are identifying any further refinements to the school's safeguarding practice.

Training and development for the assistant principals is further improving their leadership skills. Both have received guidance from the SLEs about the early years assessment information and links between the early years curriculum and the primary curriculum. This is starting to improve their knowledge and skills to plan and check for improvements in their subject areas and how these relate to early years children. The assistant principal with responsibility for mathematics has attended trust training which is providing guidance on how approaches to mathematics teaching of reasoning and problem solving can be developed. While she is clear about how this applies to the school, plans for implementation are at an early stage. The assistant principal with responsibility for English has received trust and local authority training to improve her skills in accurately assessing standards in writing. She has begun to share this understanding with other teachers.

During our visits to English lessons where the focus was writing, we noted some evident strengths displayed both by teachers and by the teaching assistants who were supporting pupils' learning. Equally, we also noted that some teachers were not precise enough in their instructions, questioning and modelling, and some teaching assistants' support had a more limited impact on pupils' learning. As a result, pupils were not as clear about how to develop or improve their work. Your own analysis of pupils' progress in writing over time shows that this is generally below that found in mathematics and reading. You have plans in place for in-depth and continuous training for primary staff across the next academic year which aims to address this issue.

Your regular tracking of pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics is providing you with valuable information about the current pupils' outcomes. This is beginning to help leaders identify where teachers need additional support to improve pupils' outcomes. Your current pupil information is indicating that Year 6 pupils' attainment should be stronger than the previous year. However, you recognise that even if this is achieved, the overall Year 6 combined attainment will still be below the aspirational targets set in your plans.

The recommended review of the use of the pupil premium funding has not yet been completed. However, the review is planned for May 2017, as identified in the trust's statement of action. You and the trust's director of primary academies agree that it is important that this review be completed in the agreed timeframe and that the recommendations are actioned promptly.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Michael Reeves
Her Majesty's Inspector