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Melanie Cox
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Dear Ms Cox

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Gomersal Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 May 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 April 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 last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure there is an increase in the proportion of pupils who exceed the expectations at the end of each key stage in reading, writing and mathematics
- diminish the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally more rapidly
- reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent by rigorously checking the impact of the strategies adopted to improve attendance.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, three representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and spent time reviewing school documentation relating to: performance management; pupil assessment information; monitoring of teaching and learning; attendance information; and governance. I observed teaching and learning in all of the year groups, along with you and the deputy headteacher, and we spoke to pupils and scrutinised their work. I also reviewed the checks that are made on the suitability of adults to work with children.

Context

Since the last inspection there have been very few staffing changes. Two teachers are on maternity leave. Temporary teachers are covering both of these posts.

The governing body has undergone more substantial change, with very few of the original members still in post.

A national leader of education, commissioned through the local authority, is supporting the school.

Main findings

You were appointed to the role of headteacher in November 2015, shortly before the inspection in April 2016. The 'requires improvement' judgement has spurred you into action, giving you the permission to develop new and more effective strategies and systems. Along with the deputy headteacher, you have been keen to learn from the good practice of others and have consequently rapidly developed your leadership skills. This transformation is enabling you to lead the school with absolute determination to ensure that the school is judged to be good at the next inspection. There have been encouraging signs of improvement in the 2016 key stage 2 outcomes. Pupils made good progress in key stage 2 in reading and writing. Progress in mathematics was significantly above average. However, progress for disadvantaged pupils, while in line with the national average, was not sufficient to enable enough pupils to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics. At key stage 1 in 2016, not enough pupils exceeded the expectations in reading and mathematics. Attainment for disadvantaged pupils at key stage 1 was not strong either. You are well aware of the work still to do.

You have drawn up detailed plans to address the priorities for development which are successfully supporting the school's rapid improvement. You review the impact of leaders' actions regularly. This is shared thoroughly and effectively with governors so they are well informed about the progress made.

You have created a positive learning culture within the staff team by sharing responsibilities, increasing accountability and giving staff ownership of systems and routines. As a result, staff morale is high and together you take collective responsibility for pupils' outcomes. The wider team of leaders have become much more effective in reviewing standards in their subjects or areas of responsibility. This in turn is helping to develop their confidence as leaders and is raising expectations of what pupils can and should achieve. The development of leadership has been critical in bringing about greater capacity for change and improvement.

Following the previous inspection, the governing body took prompt action to commission a review of governance. The immediate impact was a greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities required. This resulted in a number of governors choosing not to continue in their roles. You and the chair of governors have harnessed this opportunity to appoint new governors with the right skills and qualities to be able to hold school leaders to account effectively. While there are many new governors, they are determined to provide effective challenge to school leaders. They are already making use of training, the governance action plan and the detailed information you provide in the headteacher's report to help them ask searching questions. Governors are aware of strengths and improvements since the last inspection but acknowledge that their understanding of attainment and progress data is still in the early stages of development.

Leaders commissioned a review of pupil premium spending immediately after the previous inspection. You are making good use of the recommendations from this, along with guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation to help determine the actions taken to support individual pupils. Current assessment information indicates that disadvantaged pupils' attainment is generally improving but not at a rapid enough rate for this group of pupils. You are, rightly, aware that it is an urgent priority to diminish the difference between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. You have taken more recent action to appoint a leader who is responsible for the impact of pupil premium spending to develop this work further.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who were regularly absent was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally last year and is not yet showing any sign of improvement. Although actions have been taken, you accept that these are not having the desired effect. You are now keen to rigorously check the impact of the actions taken in order to reduce persistent absence for this group, as it is currently a barrier to some pupils being able to make the rapid progress needed.

The actions that leaders have taken to develop the school's assessment system following suggestions from the pupil premium review are now paying dividends. The revised tracking system is providing leaders and teachers with clear and helpful information about the proportion of pupils working at or above the expected standards. It has also enabled leaders to set challenging targets for each pupil. Leaders have worked with teachers in school and have made good use of external

support to check the accuracy of the assessment judgements made. The school's assessment information is, therefore, an increasingly reliable indicator of pupils' attainment and progress. It has also resulted in teachers having a firmer understanding of the expectations for pupils. The impact of this can be seen in pupils' books, which show the more rapid progress that current pupils have begun to make. You are very aware that the next important step is to increase the proportion of pupils who are exceeding the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of each key stage.

You have been very effective in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders are holding teachers to account for the progress pupils make through effective performance management targets, which are linked to the whole-school development plan. Regular reviews of teaching and the work in pupils' books by a wide range of leaders mean that teachers receive precise feedback about what they need to improve. The accuracy of the feedback and the quick response to any weakness identified is supporting swift improvement where inconsistency remains. Regular pupil progress meetings are also supporting teachers in identifying any gaps in pupils' learning so that plans can be made to help them catch up. Teachers now have greater understanding of pupils' learning and progress and what they are expected to achieve. As a result, pupils are starting to feel more challenged in their work and are clear about what is expected of their learning. This is supporting the more rapid progress which is beginning to be made.

The regular training that support staff have received, along with increased accountability through performance management, has helped develop their confidence and effectiveness. Teaching assistants are able to provide specific targeted support for pupils if necessary. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are also now benefiting from more effective support which is regularly reviewed to check the impact on pupils' progress.

You are now keen to build on the very solid start which has been made and further embed the new systems and routines so that an increasing proportion of pupils can meet and exceed the expected standards.

External support

The high quality and wide range of external support brokered by the local authority has been instrumental in accelerating the speed of the school's improvement. The school's learning partner has a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. She has, therefore, been able to arrange appropriate support so that school leaders receive the precise advice and challenge they need. Review meetings are making sure that leaders' actions are under regular and robust review. Consequently, leaders and governors are quickly developing the skills and confidence they need to sustain the improvements made so far and to drive further improvement.

A national leader of education is providing extensive support for the school. This has been effective in helping leaders to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders have subsequently introduced more effective systems and processes. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving. The additional support of a specialist leader of education to develop the quality of provision in the early years is also proving effective.

The reviews of governance and pupil premium have been undertaken and leaders have taken prompt action to follow the recommendations. The reviews have made a positive contribution to the initial improvement which can be seen in all aspects of the school's development work.

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

Yours sincerely

Kirsty Godfrey
Her Majesty's Inspector