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Mr David Akers
Ward Jackson Primary School
Clark Street
Hartlepool
County Durham
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Dear Mr Akers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ward Jackson Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 November 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 September 2016. 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 for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- commission a national leader of governance to support and challenge the governing body
- ensure that new and existing governors access comprehensive training as a matter of urgency
- ensure that the data in the new online tool to track pupils' progress is robust and accessible
- review the school's development plan to make sure that there is clear separation between who carries out, reviews and evaluates the impact of planned actions.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the director of education for the Diocese of Durham to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated and the school's record of recruitment checks was scrutinised. The headteacher undertook lesson observations and a work scrutiny with the inspector.

Context

The chair of the governing body resigned in March 2017 and a new chair was appointed from within the governing body. A staff governor resigned and another member of staff elected. A governor with skills and knowledge relating to education resigned. The deputy headteacher was appointed acting headteacher when the headteacher retired at the end of the summer term 2017. Five teachers, including the coordinator for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities (SENCo), resigned and left the school at the end of the summer term. Leaders have remodelled the workforce. Two assistant headteachers, two part-time teachers and a supply teacher commenced work in the school at the beginning of September. The supply teacher has since left the school and two full-time teachers have been appointed.

Main findings

Governors are beginning to act on the recommendations of the external review of governance that was undertaken between March and May 2017. Five new governors, who have some of the skills identified as lacking in an audit completed as part of the review, are due to become governors at the next full governing body meeting. One is a national leader of education. Most of these governors will require comprehensive training as part of their induction. Governors, while acknowledging deficiencies in governance, have not engaged the services of a national leader of governance.

Governors do not challenge and support senior leaders often enough or with sufficient rigour. At the time of this inspection, they had not challenged any of the weaknesses in leaders' plans for the school's further development. These plans have no clear delineation between who will carry out, check and evaluate the impact of development actions. The targets in the school's plans are, as the acting headteacher said, 'not precise enough'.

Governors have noted the four recommendations of the external review of the pupil premium that was carried out in February. A new marking and feedback policy has been established, although leaders have identified that it is not followed consistently well across the school. Intervention programmes for pupils at risk of underachievement have been considered and amended. The impact of intervention

activities has not been measured robustly. Governors' pupil premium strategy is clearer. A nurture provision has been created to support vulnerable pupils.

Although there is still much to do, the majority of the school's policies have been updated and the school's website is almost fully compliant with the government's requirements. Governors understand that the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' attendance and behaviour throughout the school are showing signs of improvement since the beginning of the current academic year.

Not enough pupils in key stages 1 and 2 reached and exceeded the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2017, including disadvantaged pupils. Although a greater proportion of pupils in both key stages achieved the expected standard in writing in 2017, the proportion is not good. The proportion decreased significantly in reading and mathematics in Year 2.

Leaders implemented a new online tool to track the standards reached and the progress made by pupils at the beginning of the current academic year. However, they were unable to extrapolate the information they needed from the assessment tool in the run up to and during the inspection. Over a year after the last full inspection, leaders do not have an accurate understanding of pupils' achievement in all year groups.

A check on pupils' workbooks undertaken jointly by the inspector and the acting headteacher during the inspection showed that some of the information in the new tracking tool is inaccurate and inflated, especially in mathematics. Leaders have plans to check the accuracy of pupils' assessment data with other schools within the borough. Again, in mathematics, the acting headteacher identified that there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their skills and knowledge to carry out investigations and solve problems. This is slowing the progress of all pupils, especially the most able.

Leaders carry out all of the checks required when appointing new staff. Some shortcomings were identified in the school's central record of recruitment checks during this inspection. Although easy to remedy and purely administrative, leaders said the record had been checked twice since the beginning of the current academic year. An audit of safeguarding systems and procedures is due to take place shortly after this inspection.

External support

The local authority has brokered support for the acting headteacher from a local headteacher. The acting headteacher, who was previously deputy headteacher in the school, appreciates the challenge and support given by his mentor.

The local authority has also established an 'officers' group' to monitor the progress made by the school following the last inspection. It includes members from the

Church of England diocese. This group meets twice each term and supports and challenges leaders well.

Her Majesty's Inspectors will carry out another monitoring inspection of the school before the next full inspection.

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

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector