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Mrs Helen Taylor
Wirksworth Junior School
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wirksworth Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 5 December 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 February 2017. 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:

- increase the pace of improvements throughout the school and, in particular, ensure that the rates of pupils' progress improve more quickly.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher and consultant headteacher, staff members with responsibility for improving attendance, members of the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was

evaluated and a number of documents relating to the school's performance, the safeguarding of pupils and the tracking of pupils' progress were reviewed. Together with the acting headteacher, I visited all classrooms and looked at samples of pupils' work. I also took note of Parent View and an email from a parent.

Context

Following the last inspection, both the headteacher and deputy headteacher left the school. A senior teacher is now in the role of acting headteacher, supported for two days each week by an external consultant headteacher. The role of substantive headteacher is currently being advertised with a view to the post being filled by April 2018. There are a number of temporary teachers at the school as a result of the changes in leadership and staff absences. There is a new chair and vice chair of governors and two new members have joined the governing body.

Main findings

The acting headteacher, supported by an experienced consultant headteacher, has begun the task of raising standards and expectations at the school. She has used the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection to prioritise her actions. She has succeeded in bringing some stability to the school during a time of significant change. Consequently, there are signs that her actions are beginning to improve the school. Nevertheless, the pace of improvement is not as swift as it could be.

Leaders and governors have acted quickly to ensure that a pupil premium review has taken place. Leaders now check the progress of disadvantaged pupils more thoroughly. They hold teachers to account for the progress of disadvantaged pupils every half term to ensure that additional support is having an impact. Leaders and governors have included targets for the achievement of disadvantaged pupils in each staff member's performance review. The school's current assessment information suggests that the majority of disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, are making at least the progress expected for their age.

The acting headteacher has ensured that governors are much better informed about pupils' progress and attainment, and the running of the school. Governors are clearer about the school's priorities now and in the future. As a result, governors are increasingly adept at analysing, and challenging leaders about, the school's performance information.

Work in pupils' mathematics books shows that there has been a focus on calculations this term. There is evidence that pupils are having more opportunities to use and apply their mathematics skills. Teachers are gradually increasing the number of occasions when pupils are expected to explain what they have done, and why. Pupils enjoy rising to the three levels of challenge and are eager to improve.

This is beginning to increase pupils' attainment in mathematics.

Leaders have begun to address the quality of the curriculum for subjects other than English and mathematics. In science, there is increasing evidence that tasks are more closely matched to pupils' abilities. Pupils know that they are expected to apply the improving standards of work and presentation, seen in their writing books, to all subjects.

Leaders and teachers have ensured that pupils are exposed to a wide range of cultures and religions. Displays around the school are supported by regular assemblies that challenge pupils to consider and compare different religions. Pupils are encouraged to discuss and explore the values that are common to life in a modern and harmonious Britain.

The introduction of dedicated staff to promote improved pupil attendance has been very effective. There is now much closer liaison between school and parents. Pupils and families who have additional needs are accessing early help and support much more frequently. Consequently, rates of attendance have significantly improved for all groups of pupils, although that of disadvantaged pupils still lags behind other pupils nationally.

External support

The local authority has been quick to identify the need to provide enhanced levels of support to the school during a period of change. The consultant headteacher is providing good mentorship to the acting headteacher. As a result, the acting headteacher is quickly and enthusiastically adapting to her new role while gaining the confidence of staff, parents and governors.

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen McMullan

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector