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21 December 2017

Mr Daniel Nelson
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Dear Mr Nelson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Choppington Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 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 December 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, in each key stage regularly write at length
- offer pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, greater challenge and frequent opportunities to practise mathematical skills of reasoning and problem solving
- embed consistency in terms of school-wide practices and classroom environments
- develop the role and effectiveness of subject leaders, ensuring that the rate and extent of pupils' progress is central to monitoring and improvement practices.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, governors, including the chair of the governing body, other senior leaders, subject leaders and pupils to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. The school improvement plan and subject leaders' action plans were evaluated. You and I conducted teaching and learning observations jointly in all classes across each key stage. I examined work in pupils' books with subject leaders, and work on display, and I looked at a range of documents, including monitoring reports from the local authority. I also considered assessment information about current pupils' progress, evaluated leaders' monitoring records of the quality of teaching and learning and looked at performance management outcomes and arrangements.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staffing changes. Following the previous headteacher's retirement in August 2017, you took up the post of headteacher in September 2017. One teacher resigned and another, who has responsibility for coordinating provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is leaving this term. Two new teachers have recently been appointed and are due to start in January 2018. A teaching assistant has also left and has not been replaced. You now lead on mathematics, a senior teacher is due to embark upon the special educational needs coordinator qualification in January, and you have restructured other leadership roles. Several leaders, therefore, are relatively new to post and have only recently begun to coordinate their areas of responsibilities and subject areas.

Main findings

On taking up post in September, you immediately acted upon the previous inspection findings, creating plans for improvement that centre clearly on the report's recommendations. For example, although a pupil premium review was advocated at the previous inspection, you found that this had not taken place prior to your appointment and so you swiftly initiated a review. You have already put plans and strategies in place to address the priorities for development that were subsequently identified. Teachers and governors now monitor the progress of disadvantaged groups more closely. Interventions are focused more precisely upon disadvantaged pupils' needs.

Your prompt actions are beginning to bear fruit. Current assessment information shows that, in some year groups, differences in terms of disadvantaged pupils' outcomes are reducing, especially in reading. However, differences persist in some year groups, in writing and mathematics particularly. You recognise that further action is needed to ensure that all disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress. You have accurately identified where barriers exist and are tackling these rigorously.

You correctly understand that consistency in terms of the reliability and quality of day-to-day teaching and learning practices is crucial in securing good outcomes for all pupils. You quickly put in place a set of helpful 'non-negotiables' and agreed these with staff. Your expectations about how often pupils should practise basic skills, what needs to be displayed in each classroom to support learning, and exactly how parents should be involved in their child's learning, for example, were defined. You have recognised, however, that some aspects require further discussion and clarification. Not all classroom environments are yet rich in numeracy and literacy and not all classroom practices are consistent in meeting your agreed expectations.

You are steadily raising adults' expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Teaching assistants as well as teachers are now fully involved in targeted weekly staff meetings. This means that leaders' vision and values are shared with all and expectations are more explicit. Internal and external training and professional development sessions are selected and planned carefully to meet individual adults' needs as well as school needs. Staff are grateful for the increased opportunities that you have afforded them to develop and improve their practices. The results of your efforts are palpable and are already having a positive effect on the overall quality of teaching and learning.

You have concentrated appropriately on improving reading. Adults' skills, knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning in reading have been enhanced. You are currently upgrading the school library to enrich further pupils' reading experiences and opportunities. You introduced exciting competitions to encourage more frequent reading at home. These and other initiatives, such as the half-termly meetings with parents and pupils to discuss pupils' targets, have been well received and are having the desired effect. The positive consequences of your actions are evident in the raised profile of reading across the school, the frequency of reading that takes place, the love of reading for pleasure expressed by pupils and steadily improving outcomes for pupils in this area of the curriculum.

Despite these evident improvements in reading, you have correctly identified that the quality of teaching and learning in writing and mathematics requires deeper scrutiny. Currently, pupils in each key stage, including in the early years, have too few opportunities to write at length. In some year groups, including the early years, pupils do not have enough experience of using and applying their skills of mathematical reasoning to solve problems. Some have too little challenge in mathematics and writing. Differences in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils compared with their peers in school and nationally, in both writing and mathematics, remain too stark in some year groups.

You make sure that leaders have the time they need to manage their duties. Wider leadership roles and responsibilities are now clear and regular monitoring activities take place. However, not all subject leaders' improvement plans pay close enough attention to the main areas requiring attention. The quality of teaching and learning

and pupils' outcomes are not always central to leaders' aims. The early years, English and science action plans, in particular, are too vague in places, lacking specific timelines and precise detail about improvements expected. You agree with this inspection finding and are working with leaders to improve their understanding of effective planning for improvement.

External support

The local authority has supported improvements and challenged governors and leaders, successfully, particularly since your appointment. Although the pupil premium review was not conducted immediately following the previous inspection, school leaders and local authority partners are now working well in partnership. By conducting joint observations, looking at pupils' work together and sharing good practices, the areas requiring improvement are being addressed appropriately.

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

Yours sincerely

Fiona Manuel
Her Majesty's Inspector