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Angela Speed
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Dear Mrs Speed

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Acomb First School

Following my visit to your school on 19 May 2016, 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 November 2015. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your teachers, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plans and the school's system for checking pupil progress were evaluated. A learning walk was conducted jointly with you, and a range of pupils' books were looked at. Other documents were scrutinised, including governor documentation and local authority reports and information on their monitoring visits.

Context

Since the previous inspection you have been appointed as the substantive headteacher, having been the acting headteacher. There is a new member of staff teaching in early years. A key stage 1 leader has been appointed who will take up her post in September 2016.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have tackled the areas for improvement with a calm, sensible yet rigorous approach to ensure that there is a firm foundation in place for these improvements to be made. Your appointment to substantive headteacher gave you the confidence and determination to put your own stamp on the school. As a result, you and your staff feel empowered, and you all know that you can make a positive difference to the lives of the pupils in your school.

Your school action plans have very clear actions identified that are designed to make improvements to the quality of leadership and teaching. The actions demonstrate an urgency to improve, but also an understanding that prioritising actions that will have the greatest effect on pupils' learning is vital. In addition, actions are planned throughout the year so that there is time for the impact of these actions to be measured by the leadership team. However, governors are not involved in the evaluation of these actions. It would be useful for members of the governing body to be able to do this, so that their evaluation can feed into the school's monitoring cycle. School leaders can then be held fully to account for the impact.

You and the other leader have been proactive in sourcing relevant professional development so that you have the skills and abilities to carry out your roles effectively. This has proven successful. Along with your robust action plans, a new monitoring system has been devised to ensure that a range of information is used so that you can judge the quality of teaching and learning with a focus on progress and outcomes. Also, a new assessment system has been successfully implemented to track the amount of progress pupils are making. Furthermore, visiting local schools and working with successful headteachers in the local authority have given you the ideas and inspiration to carve a leadership model specifically for your school. This has taken into consideration requirements which are unique to the situation at Acomb, and have been designed to move your school rapidly to good.

You have worked with your mathematics leader to ensure that the quality of teaching in mathematics and English has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils now access timely interventions to ensure that they are progressing at a much faster pace. Pupil progress meetings are used to identify if pupils have gaps in their learning and 'pre-teach' sessions are planned to address this immediately. Furthermore, if pupils are not grasping aspects of the lesson, time is promptly

scheduled for teaching assistants to allow pupils to further explore and develop their understanding. This means that more pupils are developing their age-related skills than previously, and a better proportion are working beyond that.

Members of the governing body have responded positively to the governor review and are now more involved in holding school leaders to account for the impact of their actions. Governors are posing more searching questions, and are being challenging when looking at information presented to them by you and the local authority. This is because the governing body now have a renewed sense of purpose and vigour. They now feel as though they have the skills and abilities to carry out their role more effectively. As a result, governors are now more able to challenge you on school action planning, the curriculum and performance management, which has resulted in tangible changes being made. This is already having an impact on pupil outcomes.

External support

You have benefited from attending the local authority induction programme for new headteachers. This has enabled you to work with other colleagues in a similar position, and to have the expertise of a local, successful headteacher to draw from. This network of support has provided clear lines of communication for you when you need advice, and has given you the opportunity to visit other schools to observe good practice. Officers from the local authority have challenged you effectively about your school improvement priorities and, as a result, refinements and adaptations have been made. Human resources from the local authority have also offered invaluable support for you in dealing with some complex staffing issues. Furthermore, you have worked closely with headteachers from the Tyne Valley teaching schools and have devised a programme of support and development for your staff.

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

Suzanne Lithgow
Her Majesty's Inspector