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Elaine Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Pennyhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 September 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 March 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in March 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- Strengthen the plan for improvement by reviewing the targets that have been set. Make sure that the targets, if met, would match the descriptions of good outcomes for pupils set out in the 'School inspection handbook'. For example, set targets that are realistic and that include progress as well as attainment. Make sure also to include targets for groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, across the school and not only for Year 6. In order to make it easier for leaders and governors to check progress along the way, consider including interim 'milestones'.
- Draw up a brief executive overview of the action plan that sets out the key actions that are to be taken and their intended impact, in order to help governors more easily hold leaders to account for the implementation of the plan.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, other senior and middle leaders and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I spoke to the chair of the governing body by telephone. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I looked at the school's record of recruitment and vetting checks, documents relating to improvements in teaching and learning and samples of pupils' work in their books.

Context

There have been several changes of teaching and support staff since the school was inspected in March. As a result, many staff were new to the school at the start of this term. Four assistant headteachers, whose responsibilities include acting as year-group leaders, have been released from class teaching in order to play a more dynamic role in promoting better teaching and learning across the phases that they lead.

Main findings

You and other leaders have worked hard to put the right foundations in place to make sure that teaching improves rapidly across the school. All teachers know the standards that are expected of them. Leaders have not shied away from giving hard messages where they were needed, coupled with guidance and support to help teachers improve. As a result, several teachers decided that they would leave Pennyhill at the end of last term. Nevertheless, the school's monitoring records show that the quality of teaching improved over the course of the summer term, and that inadequate teaching was dealt with robustly and effectively. Phase leaders and senior leaders speak knowledgeably about the strengths and areas for improvement for the current staff group. They know that consistency of approach will be key to driving improvement at a fast pace. It is, however, early days with these new members of staff.

The decision to release the assistant headteachers from classroom teaching is a sensible one. They are now well placed to check on teaching and learning in their phases, to work alongside teachers where needed and to lead by example. The school's leadership capacity has been greatly strengthened by this. It is clear that these middle leaders understand the need to be unrelenting in their work with the teachers and support staff. The impact is beginning to show through, for example in the much-improved attitudes to learning in classes in Years 3 and 4.

Other leaders have worked to put in place systems and procedures to replace those that were not fit for purpose. You now have a clear system for assessing pupils' attainment and tracking their progress, and for informing the interventions for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

You have been proactive in seeking support from a variety of sources, including a

local teaching school and the West Bromwich North learning community of schools. There is a sense of urgency and purpose, and a willingness to learn from others. You and your staff have visited other schools to observe good practice and have benefited from advice and guidance. Staff have received training in the teaching of handwriting, for example. In Year 2, books show a marked improvement in some pupils' handwriting in a short space of time.

The school's improvement plan is very detailed and lengthy. It rightly covers the areas for development identified in the inspection report. The actions to be taken are appropriate and have the potential to bring about improvement. The plan, however, is not a useful tool for governors to use to check that the school is moving forward in the way it must if it is to become good as soon as possible. It is difficult to see which the most important actions are, and their intended outcomes. The targets set for pupils' attainment are a very blunt instrument. They are not realistic, given pupils' prior attainment and the achievement of pupils across the country in recent national tests and assessments. The targets also take insufficient account of what is needed to be achieved, in terms of outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, the most able pupils, and the progress that you expect of all pupils from their different starting points.

The chair of the governing body has a secure understanding of what is going well at Pennyhill and where efforts need to be placed. The plans to link governors with individual members of staff to check on progress is a sensible one. The chair of the governing body is mindful of the need to beware of getting too involved in the school's day-to-day work as well as setting the strategic direction. He is working to strengthen and broaden the range of expertise that governors have, and has clear expectations that all governors will undertake appropriate training.

External support

The local authority has provided the school with support, for example, to improve the teaching of mathematics. This has been well received and is helping the school move forward. The local authority also keeps a close eye on the school's progress. You have welcomed the support and challenge that is offered by the recently appointed school improvement officer. He has conducted in-depth reviews and has provided clear and helpful feedback.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector