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14 March 2018

Mrs Mandy Whitehouse
Headteacher
River View Primary School
Suffolk Road
Burton-on-Trent
DE15 9HR

Dear Mrs Whitehouse,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to River View Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received two successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- develop the skills of all governors so that they can interpret and use information about the school's performance more effectively to compare it with other schools nationally
- ensure that recent rapid improvements are sustained to ensure that pupils' progress in 2018 in writing, reading and mathematics accelerates still further to more closely match that seen nationally in 2017.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and two other senior leaders, five middle leaders, pupils in lessons and four members of the governing body to discuss actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone

conversation was held with a representative of the local authority to discuss the support given to improve the school's leadership. Visits were made to classrooms to look at pupils learning and their work in books. The school improvement plan and other documents were evaluated, including information about pupils' attainment and progress and evidence of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching.

Context

The school has a new assistant headteacher in charge of mathematics and inclusion. Eight new teachers have joined the school since the last inspection. There are also three new middle leaders and four new governors including a new chair of governors. The school has employed a new learning mentor and family support worker. The headteacher had an extended absence of six months from the school following an operation in January 2017. The school has joined the Burton River Collaborative Partnership.

Main findings

Following the inspection in July 2016, leaders and governors saw the findings as an opportunity to transform teaching, learning and leadership in the school. You have shown determination to bring about improvements to teaching and learning and you have provided a steady hand during significant staffing changes. With your extended leadership team, you use a range of evidence to gather information on pupils' achievements and to judge the quality of teaching. This has resulted in a greater consistency of provision. The changes you have made are now leading to a more embedded consistency in teaching and learning across the school.

Leaders are addressing the key issues facing the school. The school development plan is focused on the right things and is used effectively. It identifies clearly areas for improvement from the previous inspection. One area of the plan concerns embedding the roles of new senior and middle leaders. You have worked hard to improve leadership at all levels. Middle leaders spoke eloquently about the support and professional development they have received to enable them to become real drivers for school improvement. This was clearly seen in the progress they made in their areas of responsibility during your absence.

Our short visits to classrooms confirmed your views that teachers are planning more effectively for pupils. For example, the least able are now being suitably challenged at the right level for their current understanding and are making better progress. Senior and middle leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and feedback given to pupils about how they can improve their work. Assessments are regular and detailed and are used to inform teachers' planning.

Feedback is effective. Pupils said that the systems they use to check their own work for errors is helping to improve their written work. One pupils' remark typified the general consensus: 'Mistakes mean our learning can get better.'

The subject leaders for English and mathematics have quickly identified what needs to be done to drive improvement further. The leader of mathematics has also overseen improvements in the planning, teaching and frequency of problem-solving and reasoning activities. Pupils from key stage 2 told me that they enjoy these activities and their books show evidence of a daily diet of reasoning. Similarly, the assistant headteacher who leads English has ensured that grammar, punctuation and spelling are featured at the beginning of every lesson and are promoted more widely than previously across all subjects. My scrutiny of pupils' books shows that pupils are now applying these skills more regularly.

Leaders have changed the school's approach to developing pupils' reading skills. Staff have received appropriate professional development, including opportunities to observe other colleagues, including those in other schools, to make sure that they are skilled in the new approach. Leaders check that staff develop pupils' reading consistently through regular short visits to lessons and through more formal observations. Pupils' outcomes in reading improved slightly in 2017. However, leaders rightly identified that this was not where they wanted to be and introduced robust new systems in September 2017 that aim to diminish the differences with pupils nationally.

A review of governance was carried out in 2016. As a result, the governing body now frequently asks more relevant and challenging questions, not just of the senior leaders, but also of other members of staff with leadership responsibilities. The questions are helping to focus the work of the leaders on refining assessment and making procedures more robust. Governors tour the classes and consider pupils' work, to gain first-hand evidence of ongoing improvements. Governors provided me with a knowledgeable account of the school's identified areas for development and what is being done. Governors would benefit from having a more detailed knowledge of the wealth of data and information available, to challenge leaders more confidently and evaluate the progress of pupils over time against other schools nationally.

Your recent surveys of parents' and carers' opinions show that they are happier with the information they receive about the progress of their children. You have updated your complaints procedures and respond promptly to concerns when raised. The introduction and use of technology through texting and the school's app have certainly helped parents to gather more information about events and about how well the school is doing.

External support

The local authority was concerned about the decline in the school's performance prior to the last section 5 inspection. Consequently, it had already brokered support for the school from its school improvement partner. Leaders have made very good use of external support provided. For example, advisers have worked well to support the development of middle leaders who are now much more effective and taking a much fuller role in leading and managing change. The effectiveness of support has

been helped by the way in which the school and local authority partner have worked together to ensure that their support has been coordinated.

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

Yours sincerely

Max Vlahakis
Ofsted Inspector