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Mrs Joanna Pedlow
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Dear Mrs Pedlow

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Dereham, Toftwood Community Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 23 November 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 time your leaders made available to discuss the actions being taken 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 three 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the most able pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 complete suitably challenging work
- enable pupils to develop their knowledge and subject-specific skills fully across the taught curriculum.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the deputy headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. The school improvement plan and other documents were evaluated, including those

relating to self-evaluation and the safeguarding of pupils. I made brief visits to lessons and looked at work in pupils' books.

Context

The large majority of those currently teaching at the school took up their positions subsequent to the previous inspection. On the day of the inspection, you were absent from school owing to illness.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have used their accurate judgements about standards at the school to determine appropriately prioritised improvement plans. Sophisticated monitoring systems enable leaders to check the extent of the progress being made towards the plan's objectives. This progress is rapid because leaders and governors have combined an insistence on high standards with precisely-tailored support for staff. The whole staff team is responding swiftly and with determination to make the necessary changes. Leaders act quickly and effectively if their ongoing checks highlight weaknesses in teaching or in any other aspect of the school's work.

Teaching is improving strongly; very weak teaching has been eradicated. Leaders provide useful feedback to staff about what needs to improve further after their regular observations of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' work. They provide support that is helping staff to make the necessary changes. Leaders are ensuring that teachers make accurate ongoing assessments about how well individual pupils are doing. Leaders and teachers discuss the progress of each pupil regularly. They ensure that pupils who have fallen behind receive the help they need to catch up.

Teachers work with colleagues in other schools, looking at samples of pupils' work and testing the precision of each other's judgements about it. For the most part, teachers are using this and ongoing assessment information to plan tasks that provide pupils with the right level of challenge at upper key stage 2. In Years 3 and 4, however, teachers do not always identify the most able pupils swiftly enough and ensure that they deepen and broaden their knowledge and understanding as well as they might.

Pupils in all year groups are working hard and with enthusiasm. They told me that they know how they can improve their work, and that they are typically given the opportunity to do so. Most pupils think that the level of challenge in their work is 'about right'; in the words of one, it is 'hard enough to make us try, but not so hard that we can't do it'. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that the most able in Year 5 and Year 6 are being given suitably challenging work to complete. In English, older pupils often write at length, and for a range of purposes, confidently. Their imaginative writing is often compelling. It conveys atmosphere, plot and character well and often builds dramatic tension. In mathematics, pupils are increasingly able

to apply what they know to tasks that involve reasoning and problem-solving. Pupils regularly correct or redraft their work, which aids their progress.

Leaders have introduced the formal teaching of reading and spelling, which was not in place at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers are ensuring that pupils read daily, and that they learn new vocabulary before they read more complex texts so that they understand them. Pupils are learning how to find out the meaning of new words, how to draw inferences from text, and how to predict what might happen next. Teachers are also encouraging pupils to become sensitive to the literary devices that authors use to create compelling descriptions or characters. Teachers are ensuring that all pupils read, or are read to, every day. They are using the information they have about pupils' reading ages to ensure that they read suitably challenging texts.

Pupils spoke very enthusiastically about reading, and the way in which teachers encourage them to read regularly. Many enjoy the element of competition that leaders have introduced; they are keen to win an award for reading a million words, for example. Pupils appreciate the considerable investment that has been involved in restocking the library. Leaders' monitoring indicates that pupils are reading widely for pleasure and across a wide range of genres. Pupils told me that even if teachers suddenly stopped encouraging them to read, they would continue because, in the words of one pupil, 'Reading takes you to another world.'

Leaders have created new long-term learning plans for subjects other than English and mathematics. Teachers are following these plans; as a result, pupils are beginning to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills required by the national curriculum. Leaders are ensuring that the trips pupils go on, and the texts that they read, link to their classroom learning. Teachers and leaders are monitoring pupils' progress in each of the different subjects that they study. In computing and science, pupils are making good progress. However, leaders acknowledge that gaps in pupils' knowledge remain because of previous weaknesses in teaching. The extent to which pupils have mastered subject-specific skills across the curriculum is too variable.

Leaders are working closely with the infant school to gain an understanding of the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. They use this information to plan ways to remove these barriers when pupils join the school. Leaders and governors assess carefully how far each of the different ways in which they support disadvantaged pupils promotes their progress. They are using this analysis to make well-judged decisions which are helping pupils to develop the ability to read more fluently, for example. Leaders are also providing parents with advice about how they can promote their children's learning at home. A high proportion of parents engage with this support. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is high, and few pupils are persistently absent because leaders challenge any unhelpful patterns of absence effectively. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that typically, disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to other pupils who have the same starting points.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are making better progress than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Leaders are ensuring that support matches individual pupils' needs, and that staff are clear about how to meet them. Leaders have high expectations for each pupil, and check books regularly to ensure that individuals are making the progress that they should. Teachers benefit from precisely-focused training and from seeing examples of what pupils with SEND can achieve. As a result, they have high expectations for all pupils alongside an understanding of how these can be realised. Parents and pupils are fully involved in reviewing progress towards targets and the effectiveness of provision, as is an expert member of the governing body. This dialogue helps leaders to identify any potential barriers to pupils' learning. It also enables the governing body to hold leaders to account for the progress that these pupils make.

Governors support and challenge leaders effectively. They gain a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through asking leaders well-judged questions. Governors supplement this information by making visits to the school. Leaders and governors review progress towards the school improvement plan targets on a continuous basis. The targets themselves are sharply focused upon the key areas of the school's work that have needed to improve. Governors are ambitious for the school, and are focusing upon the most important priorities.

External support

The local authority has commissioned appropriate school improvement support. It supported the school's federation with Toftwood Infant School. This has facilitated executive leadership arrangements across both schools and the development and sharing of effective policies, processes and ways of working.

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

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector