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Diane Broadhurst
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Dear Mrs Broadhurst

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Clarice Cliff Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 July 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 September 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 September 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 most recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

The school leaders should take further action to:

- set precise targets in the school development plan and evaluate the impact of actions taken, alongside governors, throughout the year
- use all forms of information collected to accurately identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in order to provide additional support where needed and thereby accelerate their progress
- ensure that teachers use all opportunities to develop pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in all lessons.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated. Visits were made to six classrooms with the headteacher and deputy headteacher to observe teaching, talk to pupils and check the work in their books. Discussions were held with pupils at lunchtime to gather their views of school. Other documents were scrutinised in relation to achievement, attendance and governance.

Context

Since the previous full inspection, leadership of English has been passed to a newly appointed assistant headteacher who joined the school in April 2017. One new governor has joined the governing body. Ongoing plans are underway for the school to join City Learning Trust (CLT), a multi-academy trust. It is anticipated the school will join the trust in September 2017. Governors and leaders have already made a financial contribution towards being trust members and as a result have already accessed significant support.

Main findings

Leaders and governors have responded effectively to the areas for development identified in the previous inspection. The school development plan now sets out well-defined priorities with measurable milestones. On occasion, these milestones are too broad and not precise enough, for example, 'attendance will be *between* 95% and 97%'. Appropriate actions are planned within a realistic timeframe. Precisely who will monitor these actions is clearly shown and suitable resources are allocated to support the process. However, leaders evaluate the impact of the actions they take independently and in a separate document. Consequently, governors are not always aware of whether the school is on track to meet the milestones set.

Subject and phase leaders have been well supported in developing their respective roles. They have non-contact time to carry out their roles and have received good-quality training from the local authority and CLT. They are held to account more robustly than previously and regularly provide feedback to governors on actions taken and their success. They carry out regular monitoring of teaching and learning by looking at pupils' work and analysing the achievement information collated by senior leaders. As a result, they have a growing understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas lie. Leaders demonstrate greater levels of initiative and lead training for teaching and non-teaching staff in order to promote further whole-school improvement.

The review of governance recommended in the last inspection report has been completed. This has provided governors with a very clear picture of what is working

well and where further developments are needed. An action plan, generated as part of the review, has helped guide governors to focus on the key priorities. Governors have an increasing understanding of data as this is presented by leaders in a clear and succinct format. Tracking of progress and attainment of all groups is comprehensible. Induction training is now in place for new governors but the governing body is still lacking in having sufficient personnel and expertise to draw from, particularly in relation to finance and education.

Leaders have made good progress in tackling persistent absence and improving attendance. Attendance has risen and is now broadly in line with the national average. This is due to the high profile given to this aspect. Regular assemblies, attendance weeks and rewards for good attendance have had a positive impact. Attendance clinics and the involvement of the home-school worker and education welfare officer also ensure that there is good follow-up and tracking of pupils whose attendance becomes a concern. This provides leaders with helpful information as they can identify pupils' with legitimate reasons for absence, such as medical appointments and treatment, and those who fail to attend without a valid reason.

Good practice is now shared more widely in the school. Teachers have visited other schools and worked alongside colleagues within the trust. Leaders have successfully created a climate of trust and collegiate support. Teachers observe each other and demonstration lessons are provided by subject or phase leaders. Staff look at pupils' books from different classes and share ideas. Teaching assistants have also benefited from the training provided.

An effective tracking system is now in place. Staff have received regular training and updates in order to utilise this system effectively. Assessment information is collected each half term, summarised and analysed. This has enabled leaders and staff to have a more accurate overview and understanding of how well different classes, cohorts and pupil groups are achieving. As a result, leaders can direct additional support and know precisely where further improvement is needed. For example, recent analysis has demonstrated that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not making the same rates of progress as disadvantaged pupils or other pupils in the school. However, the process of identifying pupils with additional needs is not yet secure. Currently, only a very small number of pupils have been identified and placed on the special needs register. Work checked in pupils' books and observations of pupils indicates that a larger number of pupils have additional needs. Some pupils are therefore missed and do not receive the support they should.

Effective action has been taken to challenge the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, and accelerate their progress. The leader has led training for staff and worked with CLT to develop provision for these pupils. Approximately 60 pupils have been identified and their progress tracked both individually and as a group in reading, writing and mathematics. Mentoring has been provided for

individual teachers to good effect. The quality of teaching is improving and a greater proportion of the most able pupils are making good progress.

Due to the effective support of the local authority adviser and CLT, good gains have been made in pupils' achievement in writing. Checks carried out by the local authority show that teacher assessments are accurate at the end of Year 2. School staff meet with other teachers within the academy chain to check and agree their judgements as well as carrying out regular in-house moderation. Writing results are fully considered during pupil progress meetings and additional support put in place where needed. Class texts are used to help pupils develop their writing skills, such as writing in the first person as one of the characters in the book. These books provide greater levels of challenge for the most able and are well matched to pupils of different abilities. However, opportunities are missed to reinforce pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills in all lessons and occasionally teachers do not pick up misconceptions or where weaknesses lie. This reduces the quality and accuracy of pupils' writing and limits their progress, especially in key stage 2, where standards in this aspect remain well below the national average.

Phonics is taught well in early years and key stage 1 and pupils' achievement carefully tracked. Leaders have purchased new phonic, decodable reading books for Nursery to Year 2. These, together with other good-quality resources, are used effectively to teach letters and sounds. The local authority has carried out an audit and staff have visited other schools to observe good practice in phonic teaching. Parent workshops have also been held to increase parental involvement and support. Leaders have created an action plan to drive further improvements. This has now been completed and impact can be seen in the improved phonic results this year. Provisional results show that 82% of pupils reached the level required in Year 1 in 2017 compared to only 57% in 2016. The results are now in line with the national average. Results in Year 2 remain at similar levels to last year, which is in line with the national average (national 91%, school 2017 91%, school 2016 92%).

The teaching of reading in key stage 2 has also been a focus. Pupils use their phonic skills to break down tricky words and support their spelling. The reading policy has been revised and a greater emphasis placed on comprehension skills and reading for pleasure. New books, aimed at different levels of reading ability, are used to challenge pupils in guided reading lessons. A new planning format has been introduced to ensure that the needs of all ability groups are considered and staff have benefited from good-quality reading training provided by the local authority representative. Intervention programmes and booster groups are all utilised to accelerate the progress of pupils who are falling behind.

Provisional results in 2017 show an improvement in early years and key stage 1 results. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception Year has increased and is now in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 has increased significantly, especially in mathematics, and is

now closer to, but still below, the national average. The proportion working at greater depth has also increased and is in line with the national average in mathematics, but below in reading and writing. Provisional results at the end of key stage 2 indicate that standards in writing have improved compared to 2016 and are close to the national average. Lower gains were made in reading and mathematics and these results remain below the national average. School's own assessment information shows that the large majority of pupils in all year groups are making at least average progress in reading, writing and mathematics. However, too few are currently making good progress, especially those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

External support

The local authority representative, together with the academy trust, CLT, has provided good support. The local authority representative also works for CLT and has a detailed knowledge of the actions being taken by school leaders to improve teaching and learning due to her regular contact and active involvement in the trust. CLT and the local authority have provided effective training for staff and fostered good relationships with other schools to share good practice. Their input has had a positive impact on the rising outcomes seen in the school's data.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Simpson
Her Majesty's Inspector