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Mrs Deirdre Kallquist
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Dear Mrs Kallquist

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Blaby Stokes Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help your deputy headteacher gave during the inspection and for the time he made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in March 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the deputy headteacher, the subject leaders for English and mathematics, and members of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I held a telephone conversation regarding the school's improvement with a representative of the local authority. I also met the chief executive officer of Learn-AT, the multi-academy trust that the school is currently in the process of joining. I evaluated the improvement planning and undertook a scrutiny of pupils' work. I also toured the school with the deputy headteacher to see lessons taking place in all year groups, met pupils and members of staff, and checked that the school's records of safeguarding checks met requirements. The local authority's statement of action was also evaluated.

Context

Since the last inspection, one of the two assistant headteachers has retired from their post. The senior leadership team has been adjusted so that it now comprises the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the remaining assistant headteacher and phase leaders for early years, key stage 1, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6. There are three new members of the governing body. On the day of this inspection, the headteacher was not present.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

In the relatively short time since the publication of the previous inspection report, the senior leadership team has demonstrated a determination to move the school on as quickly as possible. Leaders recognise that their key role is to improve the outcomes for pupils. Accordingly, they are focusing on driving up the quality of teaching and ensuring that teachers have access to high-quality professional development. In addition, they recognise the importance of regularly checking on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. They have written a comprehensive timetable of monitoring which sets out, on a weekly basis, what they will check on, and where.

Regular meetings are now taking place between leaders and teaching staff to hold teachers to account for their effectiveness. Teachers bring along the latest information about the attainment of each pupil in reading, writing and mathematics, to discuss with leaders. Following these meetings, they produce increasingly effective plans to show how they will support any underachieving pupils. Leaders know that teachers' assessments are now more accurate because pupils' achievement is now measured using standardised tests, in addition to teachers' judgements. This system is giving everyone a clearer idea about which pupils have skills that are in line with those expected for their age, which need to catch up, and which pupils are the most able. Leaders are beginning to pass this information on to members of the governing body, so that governors can ask them searching questions about pupils' progress. As well as looking at pupils' books, leaders are undertaking unannounced visits to lessons to see learning taking place, as well as formal lesson observations. Leaders have a clear idea about where teaching is not sufficiently effective and are ensuring that they focus their work on addressing the identified weaker areas of practice.

The drive of improvement within the school has been enhanced by the appointment of new phase leaders. Leadership is now distributed more evenly throughout the school. The phase leaders are responsible for the analysis of achievement data for the teachers in their team, along with ensuring that these teachers are using the agreed new systems and processes. More teachers are now planning sequences of lessons which they reshape and adapt as a result of what they observe of pupils' learning in lessons. The subject leaders for English and mathematics are also playing a more effective role in improving the quality of teaching. For example, the

teacher of mathematics has arranged for some colleagues to see good teaching practice in another local school, and for others to observe her teach. This has meant that staff, particularly those who feel less confident, can learn from high-quality teaching and apply this to their own classroom practice. However, subject leaders have not had sufficient opportunities to examine pupils' work from across the school. This means that they are unsure of the gains pupils are making over time, and unable to identify accurately year groups and aspects of provision where further work is needed most to accelerate progress.

Leaders have appointed a member of staff to monitor the quality of support being given to pupils who are falling behind or who are disadvantaged. This member of staff is ensuring that support is being adjusted where it is not proving to be sufficiently effective. The introduction of new, school-wide schemes for mathematics and spelling is ensuring that there is a more consistent approach to teaching these skills across year groups. New resources, such as visualisers, are helping staff to model spelling to pupils.

The governing body is playing an increasingly effective strategic role. Governors share leaders' sense of urgency. They want the school to improve as quickly as possible so that all pupils will make sustained progress and leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their education. They have a clear view of the actions that have been taken so far, and have doubled the frequency of their meetings with leaders so that they are receiving better, and more regular, information. Governors have a broad understanding of the school's current strengths. A named governor has already met with leaders to discuss the progress that disadvantaged pupils are making, and how effectively the pupil premium is being spent. However, governors do not currently have sufficient awareness about the achievement of some groups of pupils in reading, writing and mathematics across the school, such as the most able pupils.

Leaders have written a 'rapid action plan' which sets out clear and sensible next actions in respect of almost all of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. This plan demonstrates a necessary sense of urgency and contains clear measures to improve further key aspects of teaching, particularly in mathematics. There is appropriate emphasis on ensuring that staff continue to receive high-quality professional development to improve their skills. However, leaders agree that some of the success criteria within the plan are not precise enough because they do not include clear and regular milestones which leaders can then work towards and which governors can check against. In addition, although it is clear who will complete the actions stated, the plan does not always highlight who will monitor these, and precisely when. As a result, it is difficult for governors to check easily that all aspects of the plan are being completed at the times intended. The plan also does not make explicit how leaders will check that teachers are following the school's system of teaching handwriting. At the time of the inspection, leaders were aware of these issues and were attending to them.

The overall quality of teaching is beginning to improve. Classrooms visited were characterised by pupils working hard, listening to adults and trying their best. In early years, staff were seen praising children appropriately when they had made the right choices, and children were busy cooperating together as they, for instance, built a den in the outdoor area, or practised writing the letter 'n'. In key stage 1, teachers' expectation for pupils' writing was appropriate, with the most able pupils in Year 1 being required to complete a story map of Robin Hood, with one pupil writing about the 'dark, scary wood'. Pupils in Year 2 were learning when to insert exclamation marks and question marks into their sentences, with an extension task for the most able pupils. In Years 3 and 4, pupils were solving problems in mathematics, and being asked to explain how they had arrived at their answers. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were improving their vocabulary by constructing a list of exciting words, or practising their sewing in order to make their own t-shirt design.

A scrutiny of work from pupils in almost all year groups showed that, while improvements in the quality of teaching and learning remain inconsistent, there are promising signs of better practice spreading across all key stages. There is clear evidence of an increasing amount of mathematical problem-solving and reasoning taking place this term. Teachers are planning more effectively so that, for example, pupils in Year 3 are asked to explain why one calculation in a list is the odd one out from the others, or to write down why they believe a mathematical statement is correct or incorrect. In a majority of year groups, there are early signs of greater levels of challenge for pupils, including for the most able. This was confirmed by the pupils the inspector met, most of whom said that they are encouraged to move on to more difficult work once they can demonstrate that they can complete what they have been asked to do. A minority of pupils said, however, that they were still being given work that was too easy for them.

Pupils' workbooks indicate that, in a majority of classes, teachers are also beginning to attend more effectively to the errors pupils make in their grammar, spelling and punctuation. Most pupils the inspector met commented that teachers were helping them to improve these aspects of their work by giving them guidance on where they need to improve. Books confirm that, where this happens, pupils are taking note of the advice teachers give them. However, this approach is not the case in all year groups. This results in some pupils continuing to make the same errors in their work for too long. A majority of teachers are also ensuring that they are planning good opportunities for pupils to practise their handwriting regularly, and starting to ensure that pupils consistently apply the skills they have when they write stories, accounts and explanations. In a minority of year groups, teachers accept handwriting that is scruffy and untidy. As a result, some pupils' handwriting does not improve over time, or even deteriorates.

The school's behaviour policy has now been updated and acknowledges clearly leaders' legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. This policy makes clear that an important school aim is to provide a secure, safe framework which promotes equality for all children and adults in the school. The new policy for personal, social

and health education sets out how, at key stage 1, pupils will learn to identify and respect the differences and similarities between people. In key stage 2, pupils will be taught to 'understand that the similarities and differences between people arise from a number of factors, including cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity, gender and disability'. Pupils whom the inspector met explained enthusiastically how well the school teaches them that everyone is equal and deserves respect. As one pupil in Year 4 explained, 'It's about empathy. You have to always treat other people how you would like to be treated.' Leaders are fully aware that minor aspects of the school's equality policy need updating and have already scheduled to ensure that this is done at the next meeting of the governing body.

Results from the summer term 2017 are showing an upward trend. The proportion of children who attained a good level of development at the end of Reception Year rose once again and is now close to the current national average. While the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 has remained below the national average, the proportion of pupils who have attained a greater depth of understanding has risen considerably in reading and mathematics. In mathematics, this proportion is now above the national average. Unconfirmed data for the 2017 Year 6 cohort indicates that, although the progress of pupils in reading across key stage 2 remained in the lowest 25% of all schools nationally, pupils' progress in both writing and mathematics rose considerably, compared with all schools nationally.

Since the inspection, the local authority has commissioned useful support for the school through a local teaching school alliance. This allowed leaders to write the first draft of their action plan. Now the academisation process is under way, the Lean-AT multi-academy trust has wasted no time in establishing good relationships and dialogue with school staff. The whole-school review, which the Learn-AT multi-academy trust undertook at the start of the term, has been useful in helping leaders to see the professional learning needs of staff. The diocese assisted in the selection of this multi-academy trust. The local authority recognises that the school's leadership continues to need support in order to ensure that the momentum of improvement does not falter. It has agreed to commission support from the trust until the school's conversion to academy status occurs.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Roary Pownall
Her Majesty's Inspector