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Mrs Jayne Lusinski
Head of School
Lordswood School
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Dear Mrs Lusinski

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lordswood School

Following my visit to your school on 19 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 October 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the executive headteacher and another representative of the trust. We discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with other school leaders, the chair of the governing body and one other governor, and spoke with another representative of the trust on the telephone. I spoke informally with parents at the start of the school day. You joined me as I made brief visits to six classes. During these visits, I spoke with pupils and teachers. I sampled the work in pupils' books and on display. You showed me a range of documentation about the actions taken since the last inspection, including the school improvement plan. Together, we explored provisional results of the 2017 end-of-key-stage assessments and information about current pupils' attainment and progress across year groups.

Main findings

The pace of improvement has gathered momentum this year. The previous inspection recognised the effective action already being taken by leaders. These successful steps towards becoming a good or better school have now had longer to make a difference. Pupils' outcomes are rising quickly and securely. Provisional information about pupils' performance at the end of key stages 1 and 2 this year shows a considerable uplift. There are marked improvements in pupils' progress and attainment in reading and mathematics, both key areas for improvement following the previous inspection. Phonics screening results have leapt up again this year, completing a significant upward trend over three years. The school's own assessment information shows that rates of current pupils' progress are accelerating across year groups.

You, and other leaders that I met, explained how a combination of training for teachers, monitoring teachers' work to give them feedback on how to improve, and sharing best practice has lifted the quality of teaching. Available information about pupils' progress this year backs up your evaluations about the extent of effective teaching. The positive picture that you described was also very apparent in the classes that we visited together. Pupils were focused and enthused by their various tasks. They were proud to share their work and explain to me what they were learning. I was able to see, and teachers could describe to me, what they were doing to meet the different needs of pupils in the class. Sampling the work in pupils' books, I was able to see how teachers take account of pupils' different starting points when setting tasks. This aspect of teaching was a key area for improvement following the previous inspection. A culture of high expectations, among both staff and pupils, shone through the environment and lessons we visited.

The work of leaders responsible for particular aspects of the school (middle leaders) is developing well. The way that this is set to continue to evolve, with various promotions to new leadership positions imminent, is one mark of the success you and the trust have had in this area. Middle leaders' involvement in monitoring, evaluating and improving the quality of teaching has increased significantly this year, as recommended at the previous inspection. These leaders told me how their increased role has improved communication among teachers, prompting more professional dialogue about best practice. They described a very open professional culture and ethos. The leader responsible for the curriculum has led an important review of it. This review was aimed at ensuring that the curriculum is well designed to continuously promote and build on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in a wide range of subjects. Middle leaders are clear sighted about how they are going to check next year that their plans work well in practice.

The recommended full external review of governance was taking place at the same time as my visit. However, governors have not stood still and governance has strengthened since the previous inspection. An immediate audit of governors' skills, and realignment of the expectations and demands of the role, led to some changes

of membership of the governing body. Minutes of meetings show that governors ask pertinent and probing questions. These questions focus on challenging why things are as they are and whether the pace of improvement is sufficient. Governors focus their attention sharply on the school improvement plan and other tools that support the strategic direction and development of the school. The intended outcomes of the school improvement plan reflect leaders' high expectations and ambitions. Regular reviews of leaders' progress in implementing this plan against tight timeframes helps keep the rate of improvement on track.

Parents and staff told me that this is 'a happy school'. The stability in staffing and the positivity of all of the people I met, including pupils, parents and staff, support this view. Parents that spoke to me at the start of the school day were extremely positive about their children's experiences of school. They commented on the continuous improvements they have noticed in recent years since your arrival as head of school. Parents and pupils told me that they like school. At the time of the previous inspection, pupils' enjoyment of school and increasingly positive attitudes to learning were not matched by equally positive attendance rates. Inspectors asked leaders to reduce rates of absence, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. An extensive range of strategies to encourage the best possible attendance, and rigorous follow-up to any absence, have led to strong improvements. In particular, there has been a marked fall this year in the proportion of pupils who miss too much school, including among disadvantaged pupils.

External support

The trust provides effective support and challenge. A thorough and systematic approach to checking the pace of improvement is one of the many jigsaw pieces that is helping to keep the school moving forward so securely. The trust's simple and relentless strategy of 'action, impact, next steps' is well understood and followed effectively in school. Leaders and teachers capitalise on links with other schools, locally and further afield, within and beyond the trust. A very successful project between local schools this year contributed to the considerable rise in key stage 2 results. Leaders recognise the benefits of their work with the local authority to understand the requirements of the new curriculum and check the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' capabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Dunn
Her Majesty's Inspector