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Mr Andy Byers
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Byers

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Framwellgate School Durham

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2019, 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. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2018, 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become good.

The school should take further action to:

- enhance provision and support in lessons for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- provide more effective and timely support for pupils in Year 7 who need to catch up with their literacy and numeracy skills
- build upon recent actions to secure further improvements in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your senior leadership team to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I also met the newly appointed special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who will be taking up post in September 2019. I undertook observations of learning with your assistant headteacher responsible for curriculum and teaching. I also met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I held a telephone conversation with your education development partner from the local authority to discuss his view of the school's performance. I also met the chair of the local governing body. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including progress information, self-evaluation and attendance information. I also looked at a sample of work in pupils' books.

Context

The number on the school roll will increase in September, with 260 pupils arriving into Year 7. Overall, the school will have 25% more pupils than at the time of the previous inspection.

Main findings

Since the school's previous inspection in May 2018, you have accelerated the pace of improvement. You have established a distinctive school ethos which you are sharing with passion and commitment among your school community. A culture of higher aspiration is taking hold. This is reflected in improving outcomes and the increasing popularity of the school, with a substantial increase in pupil numbers in September 2019.

You have continued to refine your improvement strategies. You have redeployed your leadership team to maintain a consistent focus on improving the curriculum and improving the quality of teaching. Over the past year, you have placed considerable emphasis on strengthening the key stage 3 curriculum. A number of subject leaders have visited colleagues in primary schools to build on pupils' prior knowledge and attainment more purposefully. Decisions have already been taken to introduce more challenging texts in English in Year 7, with pupils studying Shakespeare and Coleridge. Your senior team is using its expertise to work with subject leaders to map out the knowledge and skills that pupils will acquire over time. A number of pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 commented on the increasing challenge that they felt they were experiencing in their learning. As a result of these actions, curriculum expectations at key stage 3 are higher for all pupils, including those with higher prior attainment.

Your leaders are working with teachers to use assessment information to develop a better picture of pupils' progress. This is helping teachers to modify their teaching and put interventions in place to address any underachievement. Your team checks

standards more accurately, providing teachers with more helpful information. These approaches contributed to the improving outcomes of 2018. In addition, leaders are using research to enhance the use of assessment in the immediate context of lessons. In mathematics, teachers regular start lessons by setting pupils problems from previous lessons to check what pupils have learned over time. This more immediate use of feedback is helping teachers to gauge pupils' understanding and address any gaps in knowledge more effectively. As you are mapping out the curriculum, you are also considering the assessment practices that will help teachers and pupils to check the distance travelled.

The momentum for improvement evident in the previous inspection has intensified over the past year. This was reflected in the much stronger outcomes that pupils achieved at the end of key stage 4 in 2018. Pupils' attainment in English and mathematics at grade 5 and above increased by 15% and by 9% at grade 4 and above. Perhaps more significantly, pupils' progress also showed marked improvement to a level that is now in line with that seen nationally. This improving picture extended to the sixth form, where A-level students made the strongest progress in the local authority. These successes reflect the improving quality of teaching and learning that your team has secured.

Stronger monitoring from teachers and pastoral leaders is contributing to better academic support for disadvantaged pupils. This helped them to make better progress at the end of key stage 4 in 2018, representing a third successive year of improvement. Leaders are tracking attendance regularly and have staged approaches in place to address weaker attendance. These actions have led to a slight improvement in the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and a reduction in their persistent absence. However, the attendance of these pupils remains too low. In addition, leaders do not have a clear picture of the ways in which pupil premium funding is enhancing the wider curricular experiences of disadvantaged pupils.

Actions to enhance provision for pupils with SEND are less developed. Your team has reviewed provision and is developing a programme for improvement. You have recently appointed a new SENCo who will take up her position in September 2019. Visits have already taken place to centres of excellence to develop expertise. In addition, your SENCo is undertaking appropriate training and developing networks with experienced SENCos to enhance practice. At this stage, progress in this area is more limited and more needs to be done to equip staff with strategies that will help pupils with SEND make better progress in lessons. Your team also recognises that actions to support pupils to catch up in Year 7 have not gained the traction seen in other initiatives.

Pupils talked positively about changes to teaching and learning. They identified how the introduction of 'knowledge organisers' was helping them to remember knowledge and concepts over time. The use of key subject terminology, mnemonics and images was enabling pupils to retain important ideas. They valued 'consolidation' weeks, which have enabled them to revisit previous curriculum

content and refresh their memories ahead of assessment tasks. Pupils also felt assessments were effectively managed, providing timely reviews of their understanding, without imposing undue stress. Indeed, they said that the assessment process made them more attuned to examination processes and made them less daunting. These new processes were evident from key stage 3 through to the sixth form, reflecting a consistent implementation of new approaches.

The local governing body monitors progress closely on behalf of the trust board. It meets with increasing regularity to monitor the pace and effectiveness of school improvement. Your chair recognises some of the significant improvements in pupils' outcomes and school ethos that have already been achieved. Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors are tracking progress much more assiduously. This is partly as they are receiving more accurate and insightful information from you and your team.

Your chair provided insight into the healthy support and challenge that exist between governors and senior leaders. When they want additional information or clarity, governors ask for it, and you and your team frequently provide the answers to their questions. They have a much better understanding of how funding is supporting the progress and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. Governors are aware that provision for pupils with SEND, and literacy and numeracy catch-up initiatives, have not developed as rapidly as they would like. They recognise that improvements in these areas will be important priorities in the year ahead.

External support

You have made it a priority to engage more closely with external partners to receive objective insight into your improvement work and to develop staff expertise. You have restored positive relationships with the local authority and receive helpful support and challenge from its education development. Links with local primary schools have been strengthened to give subject leaders a clearer picture of curriculum transition from primary to secondary school.

In addition, you have linked subject leaders to high-performing subject leaders across the region to enhance their subject expertise and further raise expectations. You have invited external specialists to contribute to your professional development programme. You have also carried out visits to centres of excellence to develop the quality of your provision for pupils with SEND. These actions are contributing to the increasing momentum of improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector