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Mrs S Bland
Thomas Hinderwell Primary Academy
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North Yorkshire
YO12 4HF

Dear Mrs Bland

Requires improvement: monitoring visit to Thomas Hinderwell Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 22 January 2016, 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, senior and middle leaders and the Chair of the Academy Improvement Board, to discuss the actions being taken to improve the academy since the last inspection. I also met the improvement cluster lead from the David Ross Educational Trust and held a telephone conversation with a local leader of education to explore the impact of external partnership work. I undertook a learning walk with you and your vice-principal to observe teaching and learning and looked at pupils' work with the literacy and numeracy leads. I met a group of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I examined the academy improvement plan as well as other documents, including self-evaluation materials.

Context

Three new teachers were appointed in September 2015. One of these is an experienced deputy headteacher from another school in the trust who has joined on a one-year basis to lead Year 6 teaching.

Main Findings

The Principal, working in partnership with the vice-principal, is raising aspirations across the academy by establishing more ambitious targets and introducing systems that are making teachers accountable for the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes. She is using close partnerships with the improvement cluster and local leaders of education to develop strategies that are bringing her vision for improvement into practice. This is leading to improving progress for pupils and better standards of behaviour. The Principal has developed an ambitious improvement plan to address key areas for improvement, although objectives are not always clearly linked to a clear impact on teaching or pupil outcomes.

Senior leaders are responding to the need to strengthen whole-school leadership by developing the roles of middle leaders. The vice-principal is closely monitoring pupil progress in Years 4 and 5 to encourage long-term improvement, while the secondment of an experienced deputy headteacher to oversee Year 6 is addressing their more immediate needs. Their weekly monitoring of work in books is leading to a swifter identification of strengths and areas for improvement. A shared scrutiny of pupils' books confirmed that middle leaders have an accurate understanding of standards. Their high expectations were reflected in well-structured pieces of extended writing in English and impressive problem-solving in mathematics in Key Stage 2. However, there was evidence in some year groups that standards of presentation, productivity and accuracy did not meet the academy's policy and further rigour will be needed to ensure consistency.

Actions to counteract underperformance in reading are beginning to have impact. In Reception class, children are using phonics (letters and the sounds they make) strategies in more systematic ways to help them to read unfamiliar words. Key Stage 2 children recognise that the academy had made reading a key priority, by renaming classes after famous authors and adding a range of additional reading rewards and incentives. Pupils are reading with much more regularity and purpose. The impact of these strategies is beginning to be reflected in more rapid current progress in reading.

The academy continues to work with a range of partners to improve pupil welfare and attendance. Safeguarding remains effective. Leaders have done much to raise the profile of attendance through weekly rewards in assemblies, often presented on Fridays when parents are present. The academy's welfare officer works closely with parents to support increased attendance and governors support leaders in taking firm action with parents when holidays are taken in term time. Although absence

figures remain above the national average, there are signs that attendance is improving with attendance figures for the autumn term 2.6% higher than for the same period last year.

The Principal and early years leader are improving both the environment and the quality of teaching for children in Nursery and Reception classes. Considerable improvement to the environment took place over the summer, leading to newly defined areas for Nursery and Reception children and a more structured learning environment that is helping children to develop skills and understanding more effectively. The early years leader is revitalising teaching in this area by introducing well-managed activities that are developing skills and understanding within a context that retains a creative focus on purposeful play.

The academy improvement board is bringing educational expertise and a much higher level of scrutiny to the work of academy leaders. Performance management is now closely linked to measurable outcomes, and the board set precise key performance indicators to track the progress the academy is making on a termly basis. Systems for checking the quality of teaching developed across the trust are being deployed in the academy and are contributing to improving standards, with the academy's judgements verified by quality assurance visits from trust partners.

The Principal and vice-principal have introduced an urgency to the academy improvement process that is leading to cultural change. Staff are now responding to areas identified for improvement by actively seeking development opportunities through informal networks at the academy or more formal sessions provided by trust partners. Pupils feel that their work is becoming more challenging and that the quantity of homework had increased and is having a helpful impact on their learning. Standards of behaviour have improved in and outside of lessons and the heightened provision of diverse lunchtime clubs is leading to a more purposeful environment with a sustained focus on learning. Middle leaders now need to further develop their roles in order to have consistent impact across all years. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is not yet strong enough and the current development work in this area needs to accelerate so that these pupils are not left behind.

External support

The academy has continued to work closely with the David Ross Educational Trust and in particular with the primary improvement cluster lead to strengthen leadership and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, academy leaders have worked with a local leader of education to devise and implement a more robust system to monitor the quality of teaching and pupil progress that is leading to improvements in both.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Academy Improvement Board, the Chief Executive Officer of the David Ross Educational Trust, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for North Yorkshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Kirtley
Her Majesty's Inspector