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Alisdair Nicholas
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Nicholas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Framwellgate School Durham

Following my visit to your school on 14 April 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 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 November 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 school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, senior and middle leaders and a wide range of staff to discuss the actions taken to improve the school since the last inspection. I discussed improvement activities with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and the vice-chair of the academy trust, and held a telephone conversation with the chair of the academy trust. I undertook learning walks with you and with teaching and learning leaders. I also met two groups of pupils to discuss their learning and any changes they had identified since the last inspection. I examined the school improvement plan as well as other documents, including self-evaluation documents, assessment information on current progress and governing body reports. I also examined the recently commissioned reviews of governance and the use of pupil premium.

Context

An assistant headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning has been appointed from September 2016. She joined the school in January 2016, and before taking up her assistant headteacher post will be sharing responsibilities for English teaching and wider teaching and learning developments over the spring and summer terms.

Main findings

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are acting decisively to address the areas for improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. There is evidence of a renewed focus on pupils' progress across the school, with a sharper emphasis on the performance of key groups of pupils. This cultural shift in expectations has been supported by new processes such as improved tracking systems and mid-term planning documents that are leading to more focused planning and regular monitoring of progress. Middle leaders are holding more challenging conversations with their teams through regular monitoring meetings that are making teachers more clearly accountable for the performance of pupils in their classes.

Senior leaders are balancing swift actions required to lead change alongside longer term developments to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The determination to place pupils' progress at the heart of planning is apparent across the school. As one middle leader said, 'We want to get it right'. Middle leaders have received training on data management and new tracking systems, which is giving them increasing capacity to hold their teams to account. However, further training and support will be needed to fully implement these new processes.

The recent review of governance recognised the strong skill set of the governing body and has given additional impetus to actions to improve the strength of governance. Monthly meetings are giving governors regular insight into the progress of key groups of pupils, and governor expertise is being used in more focused ways to unpick data and improve monitoring. Since the inspection, staff appraisal targets have been reviewed to encourage higher expectations with an explicit emphasis on pupils' progress.

Leaders are strengthening teaching and learning with new appointments and clear improvement plans. A new assistant headteacher is providing stronger support for professional development, while improving quality assurance measures are aligning judgements on the quality of teaching in the classroom with ongoing reviews of pupils' work and pupils' progress. External reviews of the quality of teaching with the local authority and local outstanding schools are supporting this process.

While the school is still in the early stages of its improvement journey, signs of improvement are emerging. Year 11 pupils are making better progress in English and mathematics, and key groups identified at the last inspection, including pupils eligible for the pupil premium and middle-ability boys, are achieving better

outcomes. Performance gaps for key groups of pupils are beginning to narrow in Years 7 and 8 but not as rapidly in Years 9 and 10, showing that further work is needed to resolve these inconsistencies.

Where leaders have intervened directly to improve performance tracking and mid-term planning, they are beginning to make staff more directly accountable for the progress of pupils in their groups and accelerate rates of pupils' progress. New teaching and learning groups are building a stronger learning culture and greater capacity for improvement. However, it is important that further training takes place at whole-school level in addition to that taking place within departments to increase the rate of improvement and build further rigour and consistency into improvement strategies.

Leaders have made significant strides in addressing areas for improvement in a short period of time. They have responded to the review of pupil premium with the appointment of a colleague to focus on the needs of these pupils, and signs of progress are apparent. New systems are beginning to have impact and improvement plans are providing clarity and an appropriate pace of change. Leaders now need to embed these developments in a sustained manner while providing middle leaders with further training to support their actions to improve the quality of teaching and accelerate rates of pupils' progress.

External support

The school has continued to work closely with a local outstanding school, Shotton Hall Academy, Durham, to strengthen middle leadership and the impact of the monitoring of teaching and learning at all levels. Whole-school training has taken place with a range of providers, including St Thomas More School, Gateshead, to improve provision for middle-ability boys. Further collaboration with specialists in effective provision for pupils eligible for the pupil premium from Durham University has added additional expertise. The external reviews of governance and the use of the pupil premium have added further external support and guidance to inform and refine the school's improvement process. The local authority has provided additional evaluation of the work of departments.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the chair of the academy trust, 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