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Miss Lynette Clapham
Headteacher
Grove House Primary School
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Dear Miss Clapham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Grove House Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 January 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 three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially in the early years and key stage 2, so that pupils, particularly the most able, consistently make good and better progress
- refine the school's new systems for checking pupils' progress so that all leaders, including governors, can evaluate the difference their actions and their funding decisions have made, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)
- implement senior leaders' clear plans for curriculum development, including the support for and development of new middle leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the head of school and executive headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, the achievement officer for Bradford local authority and the chair of the governing body to discuss the actions taken since the school's last inspection. The school self-evaluation and improvement documents were evaluated, along with a range of other documentation, including records of external support. You and I visited lessons together to look at pupils' work, the learning taking place and the behaviour of pupils. Discussions took place with pupils throughout the day and I heard several pupils read.

Context

There have been substantial changes in the school's leadership and staffing since the last inspection and just preceding it. All senior leaders are new to their roles in the last 12 months, with most of them taking up their posts in September 2018. In January 2018, just before the last inspection and following a warning notice from the local authority, the headteacher of Crossley Hall Primary School was appointed as executive headteacher of Grove House and Crossley Hall Primary Schools. The two schools now work closely together. A new head of school was appointed at the same time. In addition, a substantial number of new teachers and an executive business manager have recently been appointed. New governors with specific areas of expertise are now in post. School leaders seek external support from a range of sources to support improvement. This work has included a pupil premium review in December 2018.

Main findings

After a succession of inspections where the school was judged to require improvement – and in the subsequent monitoring visits where leaders were found not to be taking effective action to ensure that the school became a good school – new leaders are now creating an ambitious and united culture of improvement. A successful partnership has been formed between new leaders, governors and the local authority, resulting in a clear shared vision and healthy challenge for improvement.

The high expectations you and the executive headteacher have of the whole school community have started to filter through all aspects of school life. Direction is evident in the leaders' accurate self-evaluation of the school. There is clear evidence that pupils' outcomes are improving, as seen in the 2018 external data and the school's own checks on the progress pupils are making. However, you and the executive headteacher are explicitly clear that improvements in teaching and learning are still needed. Gaps in pupils' learning are diminishing, but remain for

groups of pupils in key stage 2. In addition, the progress of children in the early years and the progress that the most able pupils make need to be accelerated.

Governance has been strengthened. The chair of the governing body, who – it was explained – was appointed because of his wealth of experience and previous successes, has worked in partnership with the local authority to support improvement in leadership. You provide governors with the necessary evidence – including external review records – to stimulate direct challenge and debate at governors' meetings. Governors now have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, coupled with the skills to strategically address areas for improvement with the necessary urgency.

Pupils are eager to give a good account of their school. All pupils I talked to during my visit – in lessons and in meetings – spoke confidently and happily about their learning. Pupils' attitudes to learning seen during the visit were positive and pupils were engaged in their lessons. Pupils say that behaviour in school has improved because they have very clear behaviour systems. They say that leaders respond immediately to any problems. They are clear about the consequences of poor behaviour and delight in the praise and rewards they are given when their behaviour is recognised as good or improving.

New assessment systems are in place, but these are in their infancy and you have identified that they are not yet reliable. You and your team are therefore checking pupils' progress in their recorded work and through drop-ins to lessons. This is giving you a clear picture of where strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie and, as a result, you swiftly put in support where it is needed. New leaders responsible for pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils have quickly gained a good overview of the overall strengths and weaknesses in the progress these pupils make. However, they and governors agree that assessment systems need to be further refined to ensure an accurate view of pupils' progress from their different starting points. This – leaders expect – will establish how successfully they have used additional funding to secure pupils' stronger progress.

Not enough children achieve a good level of development at the end of Reception, given their fairly typical starting points. The proportion of children leaving Reception well prepared for Year 1 declined further in 2018. You have identified the need for rapid improvement in the early years. You have overhauled assessment systems to ensure that these are more accurate on entry and throughout children's time in Nursery and Reception. The redesigned indoor working spaces reflect leaders' high expectations. Areas indoors encourage children to practise and extend their learning in basic skills in independent activities. This was seen in purposeful tasks and children's engagement in activities during my visit. You have rightly identified that there is more work to be done to increase such opportunities further, particularly in the outdoor environment. You have been successful in securing additional time from the local authority to support this work.

Leaders' direction in improving phonics is evident in the lively and consistent delivery of phonics in Reception. During my visit, children of all abilities were confidently applying the sounds they had learned straight into writing. Their progress in reading, writing and spelling is improving as a result of leaders' training and direction.

The effect of leaders' work on creating a reading culture is clearly evidenced when speaking to pupils. Their enthusiasm about different books, authors and the new reading spaces in school is infectious. Pupils of all ages say how much they enjoy reading frequently to an adult in school. Some say they enjoy reading books linked to their history topics. They speak with confidence about the ways these non-fiction texts help them to learn, for example in deepening their understanding of the Mayan culture. Pupils enjoy listening to their teachers reading stories aloud to the whole class. One Year 6 pupil told me, 'You are never too old to enjoy listening to a story.' Leaders have a good understanding of the work still needed to develop – and fill the gaps in – key stage 2 pupils' understanding of vocabulary and of the texts they read.

At the time of the last inspection, middle leadership was also highlighted as an area for improvement. You and an assistant head of school have established a new curriculum model in consultation with other schools. Middle leaders are appointed and a package of support to help them in their new roles has been identified. You say that this work – along with continued work in improving pupils' reasoning skills and use of resources to support their learning in mathematics – is next on your agenda.

External support

Leaders' determined approach to improvement includes a very receptive attitude to advice from a range of carefully resourced external professionals.

The partnership with Crossley Hall Primary School has been particularly successful in implementing improvements. Work with the local authority to improve governance and leadership – and in the frequent shared checks on the quality of teaching and learning – has also helped to secure improvement. 'Signposting' to other external support has resulted in supportive and appropriately challenging advice from external professionals. Advisers speak personally to the chair of the governing body following these visits so that he can hear their independent views first-hand. Governors have monitored the effect of this work through frequent visits that are linked to the priorities they have identified in their strategic plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Kate Rowley
Her Majesty's Inspector