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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
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Mrs Christine Djezzar
Headteacher
North Ridge Community School
Tenter Balk Lane
Adwick-le-Street
Woodlands
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN6 7EF

Dear Mrs Djezzar

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to North Ridge Community School

Following my visit to your school on 27 September 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 May 2016. 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.

The school should take further action to:

- revise the school action plan, clearly describing what success will look like in this school so that governors can use the plan as a tool to hold leaders to account
- ensure that leaders are more analytical when they check the impact of training and development activities on teachers' and other adults' effectiveness
- ensure that leaders' checks on the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment lead to precise feedback to teachers that clearly identifies what is working well and what is not as effective

- clarify leaders' expectations of how staff should use the new planning and assessment systems
- ensure that leaders extend their knowledge and understanding about what a good school of this designation looks like and the rate of progress that pupils can make.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I visited lessons with you, the deputy headteacher and two middle leaders. I held brief conversations with pupils during breaktime. I also met with the leaders responsible for safeguarding and checked the records relating to staff recruitment.

Context

Since the inspection you and the governing body have reviewed the staff structure. This resulted in extending the leadership team so that more leaders are now involved in reviewing teachers' and other adults' performance. Apart from the internal promotions and internal movement of staff between departments there have been no changes in staff.

Main findings

You did not expect the judgement made in the inspection in May 2016. However, you reflected deeply on Her Majesty's Inspector's comments and feedback, took stock and have started to take the action required to address the necessary areas for improvement.

Over the latter part of the summer term you planned many new developments that have been put in place at the start of this term. These include a complete overhaul of the early years provision, including new assessment and record-keeping processes. The primary curriculum has been revamped. Key stage 3 pupils now follow a range of subjects aligned to the key stage 4 curriculum. As a result, pupils learn across a range of subjects better matched to their needs.

You have introduced new requirements for teachers to plan lessons, including at least three different levels of activities matched to pupils' different starting points. Over the last three weeks middle leaders have been checking that teachers follow the new requirements. In some areas, feedback following these checks is improving planning as teachers now receive effective guidance about how to meet your expectations. However, there is too much variability in the effectiveness of teachers' planning.

You also now require teachers to link their plans to each pupil's aspirational target, agreed during the annual review of their statements of special educational needs or education, health and care (EHC) plans. In visits to lessons these targets were clear on plans but did not link directly to subject targets, or indeed to teachers' approaches in lessons.

You have also instigated training in the teaching of phonics. During joint visits to classrooms and when listening to pupils read, it was clear that the impact of the training is variable. More needs to be done to ensure that pupils get the benefit of well-planned phonics teaching to improve progress in reading and spelling.

You know you need to ensure that you and other leaders check that teachers plan learning based on pupils' starting points. Developments in the accurate use of pupils' assessments are at the early stages. It was clear in some classes that this is developing more quickly than in other classes.

During joint visits to lessons leaders demonstrated that they have a grasp of what is effective practice and what is less effective. However, there are inconsistencies in how leaders analyse and articulate their findings after they have observed teaching and learning. These inconsistencies limit the benefit of the feedback that teachers are given on how to improve their work.

It is too early to assess the overall impact of many of the new initiatives, as you are waiting for the first set of assessment results due at the end of this half term.

The governing body has been galvanised by the findings of the previous inspection. Initially governors were surprised, as the feedback painted a different picture to the one given in other external reviews of the school. They recognise that they need to challenge leaders about the information they present and test out first-hand some of the evidence provided. This more robust approach has led to the rejection of the first draft report of the school's use of pupil premium funding because governors were not satisfied that it was sufficiently robust. A second review has been commissioned from the national leader of education from Castle Hill Special School, Huddersfield.

Members of the governing body have also revised their policy for the performance management of staff. They and leaders have received training, to ensure that everyone is clear about their role in the process.

The school's action plan does not identify clearly enough measurable milestones for reviewing the school's journey to become a good school. You have defined success based on the inspection framework but do not describe what success will look like in your school. As a result, members of the governing body do not have a strong tool with which to hold you and other leaders to account for the pace of progress.

At the previous inspection the school's arrangements for safeguarding were effective and highlighted as a strength. You have not rested on your laurels in this area of work. Clear determination from the vice-chair of the governing body and designated staff ensures that new initiatives and emerging priorities within the community are addressed.

Pupils were well supported at breaktime and engaged with a wide range of activities to keep them healthy and fit. Those spoken with confirmed that they enjoyed school.

External support

The local authority responded quickly to the findings of the inspection by increasing their level of support to the school. An early years adviser visits every other week and is steering the developments in the early years. The local authority has brokered support from the headteacher of Stone Hill special school. In addition, you have secured support from a special school teaching alliance and other headteachers in neighbouring local authorities. It is too early to judge the impact of their support.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Hayter
Her Majesty's Inspector