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Mrs Pat Baxter
Acting Headteacher
Roman Way First School
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Dear Mrs Baxter

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Roman Way First School

Following my visit to your school on 17 July 2018 with Steve Mellors, Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in November 2017. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior members of staff, subject and key stage leaders, a group of teachers, and four groups of pupils. We held phone discussions with the chair of the governing body, the vice chair of the governing body, and two representatives of the local authority.

We evaluated the school's improvement plan and scrutinised documents relating to: safeguarding; governance; pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour; the curriculum; the school's self-evaluation; provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities; and the school's pupil premium report and provision for disadvantaged pupils.

Accompanied by school leaders, we visited classes in each key stage to observe

pupils learning and evaluate work in their books. We also spoke with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. We considered the views of parents and carers spoken with at the start of the school day, alongside those of the 57 parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Context

Since the full inspection which was completed in November 2017, you have continued in your role as acting headteacher. Your acting deputy headteacher and acting assistant headteacher have also continued in their roles. Two teachers have left the school and two have joined. Three governors have joined the governing body. You have also overseen a programme of building work which forms part of the ongoing improvements being made to the school site.

In April 2018, Ofsted carried out an unannounced monitoring inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. This was because, following on from the full inspection, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.

In May 2018, in response to a request from you, Ofsted's regional director (East of England) judged that the school could appoint newly qualified teachers.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Supported well by the local authority, you and your team are bringing about necessary improvements at Roman Way First School. Importantly, many pupils, staff and parents are supportive of the changes you are making and the way in which you are making them. Staff welcome your clarity and told us that 'We know where we are going' and 'We are working towards common goals'. Parents voiced their appreciation of leaders' clear communication and swift responses to any concerns they raise. Pupils told us how 'learning is fun' and how behaviour has continued to improve since the previous inspection. We noted the obvious happiness with which pupils went about their learning and play.

Through your systematic checking on the quality of provision, you have an accurate and detailed understanding where the strengths and weaknesses lie. You, the governors and the local authority evaluate the progress you are making against the targets in your well-crafted improvement plan. Some aspects of provision are improving faster than others. For example, you rightly acknowledge that aspects of your work have yet to impact fully on teachers' practice and pupils' achievement. While the quality of teaching, learning and assessment over time is improving, it remains too uneven.

You have taken appropriate action to ensure that teachers understand what pupils can achieve. This action includes setting individual pupil targets using appropriate

national benchmarks. Nevertheless, the effectiveness with which teachers use this information to implement learning activities that are well matched to pupils' capabilities still varies too greatly. For example, teachers told us that, as result of good-quality training, they are more confident when teaching reading and writing. Teachers explained, 'We now know how to unlock pupils' creativity.' Where teachers use these improved strategies to good effect, pupils make significant gains in their literacy skills. This strong practice is not sufficiently commonplace across each key stage. Similarly, leaders' and teachers' confidence in using your new assessment and feedback approach is inconsistent. Consequently, while there have been improvements in pupils' achievement in key stage 1, these are not as great as they need to be, particularly in boys' writing.

The leadership of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is improving. Pupils' needs are swiftly and accurately identified. Teachers welcome not only the precise information about these pupils' needs, but also the ongoing dialogue with leaders about how best to meet them. However, some teachers are not applying the school's agreed strategies well enough and this is slowing the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. This is especially the case in subjects other than English and mathematics.

You have made clear the roles and responsibilities of subject and key stage leaders. These enthusiastic leaders are playing an increasingly effective role in school improvement. They welcome the additional time and support you have provided for them to carry out their leadership duties. Subject leaders are particularly appreciative of the support of local authority advisers. However, in subjects other than English and mathematics, leaders do not check the progress pupils make sufficiently well.

In Ofsted's April 2018 monitoring visit, safeguarding was judged to be effective. This continues to be the case. You and the governors rightly continue to monitor and refine the school's safeguarding procedures and seek external verification of the quality of your work. Leaders check staff members' knowledge and understanding of school procedures and make sure they are regularly and frequently updated about safeguarding policy and practice. Consequently, adults know pupils well and understand the importance of being vigilant in their duty to keep them safe.

Well-kept records demonstrate that leaders act in a timely and proportionate way when a pupil or their family need additional help and support. The family support worker makes a significant contribution to this work. Pupils told us they feel safe and that adults continue to look out for pupils' well-being. Most parents agree their children are safe at Roman Way First School.

You prioritised bringing about improvements in how adults manage pupils' behaviour. In this you have been successful. Staff understand and consistently implement the new behaviour system which is based upon your chosen school principles of 'Ready. Respectful. Safe.' Pupils told inspectors how these principles

translate into more polite, kind and focused behaviour in the classroom. Teachers welcome the simplicity of this approach together with leaders' consistent support and application of this positive behaviour system. Learning typically takes place in a harmonious and encouraging atmosphere. Your carefully kept records indicate that incidents that lead to fixed-term exclusion are falling as a result. However, where learning activities are less well matched to pupils' interests and capabilities, some low-level disruption still occurs.

Your changes have not had a significant impact on improving pupils' attendance, especially that of disadvantaged pupils and of those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains too high. The changes made to the school's attendance policy and your better monitoring of pupils' attendance is not reducing pupil absence quickly enough. This is because the leadership of this aspect of your work still lacks the rigour seen elsewhere.

You have reviewed the whole-school personal, social and health education provision and have introduced a consistent approach that links closely to the school's principles. This is a recent development and you have yet to review its impact.

The leadership of the early years is successfully raising standards. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development increased this year. There have been considerable improvements made to the outdoor learning area. Children make enthusiastic use of leaders' carefully chosen resources that enable them to develop their key skills of reading and writing, as well those in the other areas of early development. Children's writing is improving. However, adults do not challenge children well enough to make use of their phonics knowledge to build and develop their early writing skills.

Guided by the local authority, the governing body has accelerated the pace of its response to the external review of governance. The quality of governance is improving. Governors, some of whom are new, are developing a more complete understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Making use of improved skills and knowledge gained in additional training, governors are holding leaders to account with greater confidence and rigour. Governors' visits to school are more clearly focused on the priorities for improvement and governors have a deeper understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to improve. Hence, governors are playing an increasingly effective role in school improvement.

Your response to the review of pupil premium spending is not as developed as it should be. You are not drawing together the strategies to support disadvantaged pupils sufficiently well. For example, the support which is helping some disadvantaged pupils make considerable advances in their writing skills is not being replicated for others who would benefit from it. You are now correctly developing a more detailed pupil premium action plan and know this work needs to be accelerated.

You have embraced the well-judged additional support provided by the local authority. This support has been wide ranging and is making a significant contribution to the improvements in the quality of provision. The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective actions towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school can appoint newly qualified teachers.

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

Yours sincerely

John Lucas
Her Majesty's Inspector