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Mrs Jill Alexander-Steele
Headteacher
The Roebuck Primary School
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Dear Mrs Alexander-Steele

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Roebuck Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 March 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:

- put in place a school improvement plan which will guide the school on its journey to good
- embed the revised curriculum so that pupils can make more progress and reach higher standards.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and your leadership team, the early years leader, two governors, and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the previous inspection. I spoke with a group of 10 pupils from Year 5 and Year 6 and four parents to gain their views of the school. We visited most classes, including the early years unit, to observe pupils learning. I checked the single central record which shows that new staff are suitable to work with pupils. I assessed the school's summary evaluation and improvement plans. I scrutinised records relating to pupils' achievement and the minutes of governing body meetings.

Context

Since the previous inspection seven members of staff have left the school. This included the headteacher, four teachers, the administrator and the bursar. A new headteacher started at the school in May 2018 and four teachers joined in September 2018. A new bursar and administration officer are now in post. At the time of this inspection there were two teachers on maternity leave. There are no vacancies on the governing body.

Main findings

You and governors are under no illusion about the amount of work necessary for the school to offer pupils a good education. The Roebuck was last judged good in 2005, which means that many pupils have not been well-served by the school. You told me that you chose to join this school because you want to make a difference for the pupils. You want to make the school a better place to be for staff and pupils.

You identified the deep-rooted barriers which were hindering improvement in the school. Governors supported you to try and find solutions. You are determined to make changes necessary to support your high expectations for the education and care of your pupils. You are supported by the complementary skills of your two senior leaders. You all know the strengths of the school and the areas which need further improvement.

The quality of teaching has improved. During the summer term you checked the practice of teachers to identify their strengths and areas for development. You built up a picture of teaching across the school and set out a plan for improvement. You aim to improve the quality of pupils' learning by developing teachers' skills. Advice to teachers on how they can improve their practice is precise and followed through in the next lesson observation. Through effective induction procedures you have set a high standard for everyone. New teachers and established teachers work together as a professional team. They help and support each other. Morale has improved. New teachers joining the school have brought fresh ideas and skills. Increased professional discussion among staff means stronger practitioners' model good practice to others.

Training sessions are systematic and enable staff to feel more confident in their teaching. You introduced 'non-negotiables', which means each classroom is set out to a similar standard. Bright, well-organised, tidy areas with accessible resources are the norm. Pupils learn in a calm and supportive atmosphere. They feel safe and know what to expect as they move up to new classes. Aids to learning such as the English and mathematics working walls help pupils to learn and work independently. You reviewed the work of teaching assistants to identify their skills and knowledge. Teaching assistants are now more effectively matched to support pupils who need help.

The new curriculum has led to pupils showing more interest and pride in their work. You say that they are excited about their learning and talk about it more. Parents, carers and pupils I spoke with agree with you. Parents are very pleased with the homework activities. These activities encourage families to talk together as they create models or carry out research for projects. You review the curriculum each half term so that you can adapt it to more closely match the needs of pupils. You know that work is still necessary to make sure the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of all pupils and builds on pupils' learning.

Improved assessment systems and procedures are in place. Staff have received training in using assessment techniques to check pupils' progress. Teachers' increased assurance in using assessment information has raised expectations. More teachers know the stage each pupil has reached in their learning and set work at the right level. Activities engage and excite pupils. Through pupil progress meetings, you and senior leaders hold staff to account for their pupils' progress. You know there is still work to do to make sure that the use of assessment is consistent throughout the school. Some pupils commented that they are covering the same work they completed two years before. Yet, most of the pupils I spoke with felt that work was right for them – not too hard and not too easy.

You are much clearer about how funds are being used to promote the progress of disadvantaged pupils. An external review of the school's use of the extra funds is complete. A comprehensive plan guides this aspect of your work. Through identifying which pupils are disadvantaged you have highlighted staff's responsibility for the progress of these pupils. Support packages are carefully chosen and delivered by teachers and teaching assistants. You and senior leaders track this group of pupils to make sure the intervention activities are improving their progress. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are doing better than in the past. Governors check the progress of this group of pupils carefully.

You know which pupils are falling behind in their learning now and act to remedy this. Governors acted to ensure that external agencies offer the resources you need to support particular pupils. Your assistant headteacher reviewed the special educational

needs and/or disabilities register so that pupils' barriers to learning are identified correctly. By mapping out the different needs of pupils who are slipping behind, you can plan support effectively. Teachers adapt their teaching to match pupils' needs more closely.

Pupils I spoke to believe that behaviour is much better than a year ago. Parents I spoke with agreed. Your new behaviour policy sets out the standard of behaviour you expect. You affirm pupils' good behaviour but are clear on the sanctions for behaviour which falls short of that standard. Pupils say that teachers use the policy consistently so that they believe it is fair. They say that staff talk to them more and help them to manage their behaviour instead of shouting at them or sending them out of class. Pupils particularly like the 'recognition boards' which are displayed in each class and outside the headteacher's office. They explained that your name is displayed on the board if you have done something special. For example, if a pupil shows kindness to another. They say that there is very little bullying and any disagreements are resolved. Pupils I spoke with talked confidently about the difference between bullying and disagreements. This is testament to the work you and staff have done to help pupils to know the difference.

You have improved communication with parents and won their trust. You and senior leaders welcome parents and pupils as they arrive at school each morning. Parents say that this increased visibility enables you to get to know them and for them to get to know you. By chatting to them in this way you build their confidence that you will take swift action to allay any concerns. Parents I spoke with were very impressed with your knowledge of the children. Teachers welcome their pupils into classes by greeting them at the door, which helps pupils to feel safe. Parents like the use of social media to keep them in touch with activities and events taking place in the school. During this inspection around 90 parents joined their children to celebrate Mother's Day.

Action to improve teaching and the curriculum is starting to pay off. Pupils in Year 6 in 2018 made much better progress in reading, writing and mathematics than those in 2017. Attainment across the three subjects improved. More pupils attained greater depth in all three subjects compared with 2017. The proportion of pupils in Year 1 reaching the expected standard in the phonics screening check matched the national average, which is a significant improvement compared with 2017. This is due to an emphasis on systematic teaching of phonics and a focus on language development. These are promising results. However, the picture is more variable at the end of the early years and at the end of key stage 1. In 2018 the proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of Reception fell. You and senior leaders investigated the reason for this drop and have acted to remedy it. You have made sure that these pupils, now in Year 1, are catching up. I looked at several writing books of pupils in Year 1, which showed strong progress for these pupils. Pupils have moved on

from untidy writing of a few words or phrases to writing several sentences, using a wide range of vocabulary. In the 2018 end of key stage 1 assessment, more pupils reached the expected standard and greater depth in reading. This included disadvantaged pupils. The number of pupils reaching the expected standard in writing and mathematics dropped. You know the reason for the drop and are making sure these pupils make up lost ground.

You have made changes in the early years to create more space inside and outside. You appointed an experienced teacher to lead the early years. She knows what needs to improve and has already acted to develop a more consistent approach to teaching. Precise, dedicated teaching sessions focus on language development and phonics. Well-planned areas with resources which children can reach support their independent learning. I saw examples of the success of these changes. I watched two boys as they made a list of the ingredients used in the cake they had made in the mud kitchen. They concentrated on sounding out the letters they needed for each word until satisfied each was spelled correctly, tussling over the word 'sprinkles'. Such activities ignite children's imaginations and enable them to test out the vocabulary and phonics skills they are learning. Other children were keen to show me their writing. One little girl confidently read out the three sentences she had written by herself. Better provision is starting to show what children can achieve in the early years. You believe that more children will reach a good level of development at the end of Reception this year.

You know the strengths of the school and the action needed to improve weaknesses. A shared approach to leadership and an understanding of roles and responsibilities has led to a focus on improvement. Through monitoring and evaluation of the school's work, the action-planning process is sharper. You set a series of short-term plans to tackle some of the deep-rooted issues. These plans include actions, clear success criteria, accountability, timelines and impact. You are now at the stage when a more strategic approach to school improvement is best supported by a longer-term plan of action.

External support

The local authority supports you and senior leaders by organising training for groups of, and individual, staff. The local authority facilitated a meeting of external agencies to provide a solution to some of the long-term obstacles to the school's success. Termly meetings of the senior leadership team and the local authority officer check the progress of improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Senior Her Majesty's Inspector