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Mrs A Stringer
Headteacher
Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School
Forester Drive
Stalybridge
Cheshire
SK15 2DP

Dear Mrs Stringer

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Gorse Hall Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 26 November, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior leadership team, two literacy coordinators, the two co-Chairs of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan, literacy plan and monitoring records were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection, the number of governors has been reduced to 12 and two governors, one of whom was the former Chair, now share the role of Chair. One teacher has been absent for some weeks and a newly qualified teacher is covering the absence.

Main findings

The school has moved on considerably in the weeks since the inspection. The improvement plan has a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and on raising standards although it is not explicitly linked to specific, measurable success criteria, which do appear in other documents. Planned action and the actions already taken reflect the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. Senior and middle leaders are aware of their responsibilities in driving improvement.

Two key actions since the inspection have had a significant impact. First, the clarification of the accountability and expectations of teachers and second, the regular monitoring of teaching along with paired coaching to improve the quality.

All teachers have clear, measurable performance targets linked to the new Teachers' Standards and to pupils' progress. This half-term, for the first time, all class teachers have analysed and interpreted data concerning the progress of pupils in their classes. The teachers' discussions with the headteacher and deputy headteacher have informed decisions about support and challenge for individual pupils and groups. However, the data indicate a need to sharpen some targets, especially the expectations of Level 3 attainment at the end of Year 2. Questions also arise concerning the proportions of pupils in each year group who appear not to have made progress, and about the impact of the wide programme of intervention and support.

The school is investing heavily in professional development. For example, it is making good use of external consultants to quality assure the headteacher's and deputy headteacher's judgements of teaching, and to provide professional development in the teaching of writing and in the skills needed by subject leaders. It is also drawing on expertise in other schools to advise and enable staff to see effective practice. Staff commented on ideas they had seen in other schools and which they are now using. So far, the focus in monitoring the quality of teaching has been on key elements, including the planning of lessons. There is a need to look closely at key skills, such as questioning, and to identify the factors that lead to good learning, most especially in writing.

The school is retaining a focus on reading where action in the last academic year was successful in raising standards. Effective strategies are now being applied to writing with regular sessions related to spelling, grammar and punctuation, and themes to interest the boys.

The governing body is providing support and critical challenge to the headteacher. The Chair ensured that all governors were aware of the implications of the outcome of the inspection. Governors are well informed about the school's performance and of the links between pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. They are looking at ways to evaluate the impact of external consultancy and the effectiveness of strategic decisions to provide targeted support for groups of pupils.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommends that further action is taken to:

- use points to track pupils' attainment and progress, thus ensuring that a) progress within a sub-level is recognised, and b) the fine adjustment of targets reflects where more progress is needed for a pupil to keep pace or to fulfil his/her potential
- shift some monitoring by senior leaders to focus on the quality of learning, especially in writing, in order to identify the factors in teaching that ensure at least good learning both in a lesson and over time
- provide professional development in the art of questioning, particularly in relation to fostering pupils' awareness of their own learning
- ensure that key subject leaders analyse pupils' work to identify specific aspects for improvement at school, key stage, cohort or class level.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school has sought and benefited from external support on several fronts. A representative from the local authority is in regular contact with the school and has provided useful guidance on issues related to staffing. He has also facilitated contact with other schools within the cluster. The School Improvement Partner is providing a critical review of the quality of teaching and identifying aspects for development. His verbal report to HMI during this inspection indicated an improvement in the quality of teaching since his visit in late October.

I am copying this letter to the co-Chairs of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Tameside.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector