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22 May 2013

Mrs Rachel Simmonds
Headteacher
West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School
Hangleton Way
Hove
BN3 8BN

Dear Mrs Simmonds

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to West Blatchington Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior leaders, and representatives of the governing body. I had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority. I also met briefly with the headteacher of Hove Park School. I reviewed your action plan, and scrutinised evidence in your monitoring records. We toured the school and briefly visited some lessons to observe teaching and learning, and to discuss developments in context.

Context

A decision has recently been taken to enter into a partnership with Hove Park School. As a consequence of this partnership arrangement the governing body will no longer be seeking to appoint a headteacher but will have a head of school, accountable to the executive headteacher who will be the current headteacher of Hove Park School.

Main findings

- The school continues to improve. You and your senior team know precisely what needs to be done in order to secure good achievement across the school, and you have some good systems in place already. You and your team champion improvement, and show high levels of commitment, energy and resilience.
- You are addressing the need to improve teaching that is not yet good, and working successfully to eradicate inadequate teaching. You are confident that the targets for the achievement of current Year 6 pupils will be met, and that recent improvements in Key Stage 1 achievement are secure. Your monitoring of pupils' achievement indicates that progress is continuing to improve throughout the school, especially in writing and reading. Middle ability pupils' progress is being monitored particularly closely and there are good intervention strategies in place where pupils are not making good progress; it is too early to see their impact.
- Behaviour is improving. Pupils move around the school more calmly, and transitions in lessons are better managed. This is because all staff are clearer about their roles and responsibilities. Some teachers are not yet confident about trying out new teaching strategies, and then having to manage changes in pupils' behaviour patterns as a result. This is holding back improvements in teaching, and in behaviour, in some classrooms.
- Due to the legacy of previously poor leadership in the school, some middle leaders do not have a strong capacity to steer teaching in their subject to become good, or to develop a lively and engaging curriculum for pupils. You are addressing this as a matter of urgency by being very clear about your expectations of subject leaders, and by providing them with valuable training and coaching. For example you recently used a work-scrutiny exercise to identify where pupils are making good progress, and why, and at the same time modelled how such monitoring should be done by subject leaders in the future. Literacy and numeracy are already well-led curriculum areas.
- Governance has continued to improve since the inspection in February. Governors are now confident about their role: they are keen to show strong strategic leadership in order to make this a good school, and they know how to do this.
- You recognise that having a high level of cooperation with the local community is an essential aspect of improving achievement and attendance. Parents are encouraged to attend events aimed at helping them to assist their child to develop literacy and numeracy skills. Strong links with local religious groups and community leaders are not yet in place.
- You and your governors recognise that the combination of the wide-ranging challenges the school faces currently, and weaknesses in subject leadership, mean that it may not improve to become good as quickly as it should. You have, therefore, taken the step of establishing the partnership with Hove Park. The aims are to learn from the strong positive culture of improvement

you see there, to have personnel and other support services provided with economies of scale, and for subject leaders to benefit from high level subject-specific leadership training.

- It is not clear yet what the mechanisms will be to check that the school is improving rapidly and that agreed targets are being met, under this partnership. No group has yet been identified as having responsibility to oversee this transition and hold members of the partnership to account.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- work with the local authority to identify an existing group, or establish a new one, that will take responsibility for the oversight of the development of the partnership with Hove Park School, and hold key staff accountable for delivering agreed outcomes
- continue to develop the capacity of subject leaders to improve outcomes for pupils by increasing the proportion of good or better teaching and developing a stimulating curriculum, as a priority
- consider having subject leaders and other key staff attend one of the conferences run by Ofsted designed to boost achievement in English and mathematics.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is supporting leadership development in several key foundation subjects, and several are now better led as a consequence. The school has benefited from a special fund from the National College for School Leadership which is used to pay for a subject leader of education from a local teaching school to work with staff. She is helping the school to address some shortcomings in literacy teaching and learning in Years 1 and 3, and the quality of teaching in Year 5.

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

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Brighton and Hove.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector