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12 June 2013

Mrs Anne Doughton
Headteacher
Horn's Mill Primary School
Denbigh Close
Helsby
Frodsham
Cheshire
WA6 0ED

Dear Mrs Doughton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Horn's Mill Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit, accompanied by Jo Morgan Senior HMI, to your school on 11 June 2013, 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and those in charge of subjects. I also met the Chair and most members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plan was evaluated. We also visited a small number of lessons and scrutinised a range of documents, for example the school's records related to checking the quality of teaching. In addition, we looked at a small sample of pupils' written work.

Context

There have been no significant changes since the last inspection that judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

The school's action plan for tackling the areas for improvement from the last inspection is not sharply focused on the impact of proposed actions on pupils' achievement and targets are not clear or readily measurable. New systems for checking on teaching, pupils' progress and for performance management are still not coherent or sufficiently well - embedded across the school despite this being an area for improvement at the last inspection.

There has been some training for teachers, to improve the quality of teaching and learning, through the school's partnership with an outstanding school led by their local authority improvement adviser. Senior leaders therefore now have a better understanding of the characteristics of outstanding teaching and learners. However, feedback to teachers on the quality of their teaching is not sharp enough.

Feedback does not provide a clear judgement on teachers' performance or precise targets and deadlines for improving it. Nor does it include a clear link to continuing professional development that is closely matched to teachers' development needs. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that feedback is not explicitly linked to the Teaching Standards. Subject leaders do not yet demonstrate sufficient capacity to ensure that all teaching is good.

The communication of information from senior leaders to governors about the school's performance has not been good enough. Nevertheless, governors are very committed to the school's improvement. Once they noted a decline in pupils' achievement they mounted a very vigorous challenge to the school. They are now using assessment information independently and proactively to ensure that the school improves.

The spending of the pupil premium funding (additional funding allocated for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority, or members of service families) is not having enough impact on pupils' achievement because there are too many systems for identifying under-achieving individuals and pupil groups, for the system to be clear to and usable by all staff to understand precisely how well pupils are learning.

Senior leaders are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- revise the school development plan to include a sharper focus on pupils' achievement and clear, measurable targets
- provide greater support for the school in quickly improving the work of teaching staff and the achievement of underperforming groups
- provide urgent and good quality training so that all staff are able to use assessment information and to improve the rate of pupils' progress, particularly in mathematics and English
- ensure that all marking shows pupils exactly how to improve their work
- streamline the different systems for checking pupils' progress and teachers' performance to give senior leaders an accurate view of areas for improvement and bring about change more quickly
- speed up the development of subject leaders to ensure that all teaching improves quickly to good

- agree a programme of intensified intervention from the local authority to ensure the school improves and provides a good education for all its pupils before the next full inspection in around 18 months' time.

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 has provided support for the school's improvement but until recently this has been delivered through a succession of different advisers and this has slowed progress. The continuity provided by the current adviser is beginning to help the school to move forward. The school is also supported by a National Leader of Education (an experienced headteacher colleague from an outstanding school). It is too early to judge the impact of this work.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector