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Mrs Margaret Henderson
Headteacher
Corbridge Middle School
Cow Lane
Corbridge
Northumberland
NE45 5HX

Dear Mrs Henderson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Corbridge Middle School, Northumberland

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, subject leaders for English and mathematics, the chair, vice-chair and one other member of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority. I undertook a tour of the school with two pupils, evaluated the school improvement plan and scrutinised a range of documents including minutes of the governors' steering group meetings, department action plans, and the school's records on pupil progress and the quality of teaching.

Context

There have been a number of changes to the school's staffing since the inspection. The subject leader for mathematics stepped down and will retire at the end of the summer term. A member of the mathematics team has taken the role on a temporary basis and an external appointment has been made from September. New subject leaders for physical education and modern foreign languages will take up post in September and a new subject leader for science has been appointed for January. The governors have set up a steering group, which includes a representative of the local authority, to oversee improvement work in the school.

Main findings

The headteacher has prepared a detailed action plan linked to each of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Evidence gathered during this visit demonstrates that the school has made a positive start in meeting many of the targets in the plan. For example, systems to improve how the school tracks the attainment and progress of all pupils and groups of pupils have improved and this information is enabling teachers to plan lessons in which activities match the needs of all pupils. The school has introduced a common format for planning lessons and following a detailed scrutiny of pupils' books a new marking policy is planned. The monitoring of teaching and learning is currently carried out by the headteacher with the support of a local authority adviser and the school's records of observations show that teaching is improving.

The action plan contains a range of strategies to tackle each of the areas for improvement and the success criteria by which they should be measured. However, milestones for completion are not always clear and at present the plan is too dependent on the leadership of the headteacher. Other senior leaders, along with the developing middle leaders, need to be given responsibility for leading and monitoring areas of improvement. Middle leaders in particular need to take a more active role in checking on standards and driving forward improvements in teaching and learning.

The school's governors visit the school on a regular basis and are well-informed about its work. A steering group has been established to regularly monitor the impact of actions taken to improve the school. Evidence from governing body minutes show they receive detailed information about the progress of pupils and reports which confirm that teaching is improving.

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:

- refine targets within the school development plan so that leaders, including governors, can more easily measure the impact of the school's work
- develop the role and expertise of subject leaders to enable them to be held accountable for developments in their area of responsibility
- ensure that relevant subject leaders attend one of the Ofsted 'Better English and mathematics' seminars.

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 adviser is confident that the school leaders have the capacity to drive the required improvements and has provided support to senior managers in judging the quality of teaching and learning in lessons. The adviser has agreed to monitor and assess the progress being achieved prior to a future visit from Her Majesty's Inspector.

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

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector