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Ryan Driver
Halfway Houses Primary School
Southdown Road
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Kent
ME12 3BE

Dear Mr Driver

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Halfway Houses Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 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 April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school action plan and other documentation such as your current evaluation of how well you are doing. You escorted me on a tour of the school enabling me to visit a number of lessons and talk briefly with pupils.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, you have acted decisively to ensure no time is wasted in securing improvement. Governors have sensibly sanctioned a new leadership structure to strengthen capacity to bring about rapid improvement. You have

effectively by-passed the difficulty previously experienced in recruiting to the vacant post of deputy headteacher, by creating two new assistant headteacher posts instead, thereby widening the field of potential applicants. An internal appointment has already been made to one of these posts with further interviews to fill the second post, scheduled for September. At middle leader level, governors have correctly sanctioned the deletion of ineffective subject leader roles, now replaced by four team leaders from within the school, responsible respectively for literacy, numeracy, science and foundation subjects. You have correctly worked alongside these leaders, training them in observation and evaluation skills and providing time for them to monitor teachers' work. Although new in these roles, each of these post-holders is beginning to effect the necessary improvements.

Weak teaching is being effectively addressed; teachers are either being supported to improve or have left. For example, in order to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge in science and other subjects, leaders of these areas have produced subject knowledge booklets and a skills inventory for each level in every year group. These are now in full use and have been welcomed. Monitoring of pupils' work and of teaching conducted this term suggest that these strategies are yielding improvements.

Effective coaching opportunities have been provided for targeted teachers and you plan to extend this approach to include additional adults in the classroom. Classroom observations moderated by the local authority adviser and staff from a link school, point to improvements in teaching and achievement in some year groups. Your extensive programme of classroom observation and work scrutiny is already enabling you to correctly identify strengths and areas for further development for each member of staff. It is appropriate that you plan to factor this information into the forthcoming cycle of performance management targets set for teachers in September.

In order to raise achievement in mathematics you have seized the opportunity to build your own expertise by working with the local authority advisor to strengthen the reliability of teacher assessments. Initially, this has involved local authority-led training coupled with external moderation of teachers' judgements of pupils' work. You rightly intend to follow this up next term with whole-staff training and further input led by the numeracy team.

Your self-evaluation is accurate. Equally, your action plan identifies the correct priorities with appropriate actions set within a realistic time-scale. Governors are fully involved in monitoring the success of the plan. However, some minor adjustments need to be made to the measures of success, which are not always linked to pupils' outcomes.

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:

- strengthen the programme of staff training to ensure that it is tailored at an individual teacher level to address identified weaknesses in their teaching
- ensure that the targets identified within the newly devised team leader action plans are linked to their performance management targets so that the impact of their leadership can be effectively evaluated
- ensure that all teachers and other adults that work in the classroom accept and understand their accountability for improving pupils' achievement and know how they are being supported to enable pupils to make better progress than in the past
- adjust the action plan so that measures of success are linked to pupils' achievement targets.

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 effective support within this academic year. To strengthen governance, an additional governor has been sourced and a link with a successful school has been brokered. The local authority adviser has set up training and moderation of teacher assessments in mathematics and has conducted joint observations with the headteacher and other leaders. These strategies have helped strengthen leaders' confidence in their judgements of achievement and teaching. The headteacher and other leaders would benefit from further support in measuring the impact of leadership activity in relation to improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector