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Mrs Deb Halliday
Headteacher
Athelstan Primary School
Richmond Park Way
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S13 8HH

Dear Mrs Halliday

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Athelstan Primary School, Sheffield

Following my visit to your school on 17 September 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.

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

- Provide individual teachers, whose work has been identified as requiring improvement, with more personalised training and support.
- Use the findings from the review of governance to plan a programme of support and training for governors.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. All classrooms were visited and some pupils' exercise books were scrutinised. Brief discussions were held with a small number of pupils in their classrooms and as they moved around the school. The school improvement plans were evaluated along with other school documentation including records from lesson observations.

Context

Since the inspection in May 2013 the deputy headteacher has retired and an acting assistant headteacher returned to her previous post within the school. Two new deputy headteachers have been recruited and took up their posts at the start of this term. Four teachers left the school in July and five teachers joined the school in September.

Main findings

Issues have been tackled with urgency and rigour; many new routines and systems have been introduced to ensure whole school consistency. Although introduced relatively recently this is having a demonstrable effect on classroom practice. For example, a whole school approach to planning lessons means that all teachers include opportunities for pupils to undertake discussions in groups and pairs. A school-wide system of target setting means that pupils' exercise books indicate target levels and information about what each pupil needs to do to reach these targets. Pupils are beginning to talk about their levels and some are using this information to help them to improve their work but this is not yet consistent across the school. A new approach to the teaching of handwriting has been introduced and all staff are modelling the correct formation of letters and pupils undertake regular handwriting practise. Pupils are already commenting that this is helping them to improve the presentation of their work.

A more robust and rigorous approach to checking on the impact of improvements means that senior leaders know where most improvement is needed. The headteacher correctly identifies the need for greater consistency in the application of agreed school policies and procedures. Improvement plans are sound and systematically tackle issues requiring improvement. Plans include some work with other schools but as yet no formal partnerships have been established with better performing schools. Although there has been increased staff development related to improving the quality of teaching, this training is for all teachers and there are no individual plans for teachers whose work has been identified as requiring improvement. The appointment of two new deputies has added a greater level of enthusiasm and expertise to the senior leadership team. Although only 17 days in post, they are clear about their role in securing improvements but realise that it is early days and much still needs to be done in order for the school to be good at its next inspection.

Governors have a better understanding of their role and are aware that their skills at challenging the school need to be developed further. A review of governance is underway and should provide a useful steer to the actions that governors need to undertake in order to fulfil their roles effectively. There are local authority vacancies on the governing body and this is an opportunity for the local authority to strengthen the governing body by providing an experienced governor to support less experienced governors.

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

Senior leaders have responded positively to the last inspection and have already begun to implement their plans for improvement. However, although some work with other schools has been planned there are no formal partnerships with other better performing schools. Prior to the last inspection the local authority had evaluated that the school required only minimal support. Subsequently, the local authority has signposted the school to other local schools where better practice can be observed. The local authority has plans to undertake an audit of teaching and learning in partnership with senior leaders. However, at this stage the local authority's role in securing better teaching is not precise.

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

Yours sincerely

Amraz Ali

Her Majesty's Inspector