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Mrs Anita Gutteridge
Hillside Avenue Primary and Nursery School
Hillside Avenue
Norwich
NR7 0QW

Dear Mrs Gutteridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hillside Avenue Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- share the good practice in marking that is developing, particularly pupils' responses, so that a model of building on the very best teaching is firmly established
- enable middle leaders to observe and evaluate teaching and learning in order to measure the impact of the work they are leading
- follow-up the recent review of governance by linking governors to particular priorities, supported by training tailored to their needs.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, three middle leaders and four governors. I held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records, analysed pupil progress data, scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, three teachers have left the school. They have been replaced by three suitably qualified teachers. A review of governance has been carried out.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written an action plan focused on areas that require improvement
- increased opportunities for staff to plan together
- introduced new policies for writing, spelling and marking
- made monitoring and evaluation more frequent and more rigorous
- raised the profile of 'enquiry' work as a context for writing
- used data more analytically to measure the impact of interventions.

Your actions to tackle the areas requiring improving are having clear impact. The quality of pupils' writing has improved since the start of term, particularly marked in Year 5. All staff are making a concerted effort to raise the standard of handwriting, increase the accuracy of spellings and improve the use of punctuation. Most staff write clearly to set a good example to their class. Pupils are planning their writing more thoroughly, writing more at length and taking greater pride in their work. Parents and carers are noticing the difference.

Your new marking policy is helping to make teachers' expectations of pupils more consistent. Teachers are giving pupils clearer feedback about why particular work deserves praise and how to improve their work further. Pupils are responding well, particularly in Year 3 where their written comments in response to teachers' marking show levels of understanding that staff are able to follow-up. This is helping to meet the needs of different pupils, including the more able pupils who show they are ready for a higher level of challenge. However, the pace of improvement could be quickened by giving those leading on particular initiatives more opportunity to evaluate impact.

Your strategy to 'get the school to good' is well-informed. You have already taken account of additional areas, for example the impact of additional funding on pupils' physical development. Your recent appointment of a sports coach is starting to build on your work with sports leaders at the local high school. Although pupils attained much higher standards this year when tested you are also using data more analytically to focus on areas in which pupils achieved less well this year, for example reading. The 'extreme reading challenge' set during the summer, development of a reading room for parents to use with their children, introduction of reading records and imminent development of the library build on the good partnerships with parents and carers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage which gets pupils' reading off to a strong start.

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

You are collaborating well with other schools in the Thorpe Educational Partnership and are planning to work with a local Teaching School, to address the areas that require improvement. You have also used specialist support provided by the Local Authority, for example to improve provision in English and mathematics.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector