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Andrew Hunt
Headteacher
Harrowbarrow School
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Callington
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Dear Mr Hunt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harrowbarrow School

Following my visit to your school on 8 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 June 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:

- the headteacher, another senior teacher and the Chair of the Governing Body to attend and Ofsted seminar 'Getting to Good'
- members of the governing body should undertake a training course in how to analyse school data and ask challenging questions in order to hold the school to account
- strengthen the school development plan by explicitly stating how governors will evaluate the success of actions and inserting interim milestones towards agreed targets

- pursue links with good and outstanding schools where direct observations of the quality of teaching can be undertaken and used as effective models so that teaching at Harrowbarrow can rapidly improve.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, four members of the governing body, a phone call was held with the school improvement partner to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A number of documents were scrutinised including; the outcomes of recent lesson observations and work scrutiny, meetings of governing body minutes, analysis of pupils' current attainment and rates of progress, notes of visits and data analysis undertaken by the school improvement partner.

Context

Since the last inspection, consultations on the future of the school have been on-going. Changes to becoming one of four schools in a Multi Academy Trust are developing with the view to establishing the Trust in Spring 2014. Additional pupils arriving at the school in Years 3 and 4 have meant a minor staffing re-organisation. The Year 5 and 6 teacher has returned from maternity leave.

Main findings

The initial disappointment with the outcome of the recent inspection has largely been overcome and is now accepted by staff and governors. Leaders and managers have a clearer picture of what the school needs to do to improve and there is a renewed sense of rigour to develop the quality of education provided. This is vitally important because Year 6 results declined further in July 2013. This further highlights the urgency and efforts required in order to make rapid and sustained progress and become good. The school is aware there is no room for complacency and have a limited time span to act. The positive start being made will need to be maintained with methodical precision as the distance to travel to becoming good is now greater than at the time of the inspection.

Training for all staff on teaching Visual Literacy is leading to a greater engagement and involvement in learning from boys. This is important as the gap between boys' and girls' performance is wide. Feedback from a recent work scrutiny for pupils in Years 5 and 6 illustrates some early positive impact of this training with some mature use of vocabulary. Visits to a nearby outstanding school have provided clear success criteria for teachers and pupils to analyse their writing. These 'writing ladders' are helping pupils reflect on their achievements and carefully identify their next steps in learning. Regular training provided for teaching assistants by the Year

5 and 6 teacher is strengthening their knowledge, expertise and skills in working with intervention groups.

The introduction of new transition arrangements for all pupils moving through the school has helped speed up pupils' achievement following the summer break. Attendance in their new class for the penultimate two weeks of the summer term in July, combined with 'bridging tasks' focussing on writing during the summer holidays, has ensured teachers' better knowledge and understanding of pupils' prior learning when the Autumn term started. This has resulted in better progress being made so far this term than has previously been seen. Parental workshops on the teaching of writing, undertaken early in the academic year have been well received and help support pupils' learning at home.

Senior leaders have strengthened their monitoring of teachers' performance. More frequent pupil progress meetings are enabling earlier identification of those pupils at risk of falling behind. This, in turn, is holding staff to account more rigorously for the performance of pupils in their class. Lesson observations now contain a clear set of non-negotiable expectations linked to the 'Teachers Standards' for every teacher. A structured coaching plan has been introduced to support and challenge those teachers who are not yet consistently good.

The school development plan clearly identifies actions to improve teaching and learning. Precise details of how this translates into improvements in pupil outcomes over time and, how specific actions will be evaluated, are less strong. The headteacher intends to revise the plan with governors and the school improvement partner.

The governing body have been pro-active in conducting an external review in order to contribute more strongly to the leadership of the school. The appointment of the headteacher from a local outstanding secondary school is a valuable addition to the skill-set of the governing body. Helpful and informative reports from the headteacher are enabling some, although not all governors to get behind the pupil progress headlines and ask more challenging questions. The chair of the governing body recognises some additional training would benefit the school in this area. An increasing number of visits to gather first hand evidence of the school's work are now taking place.

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 school has received communication from the local authority indicating their willingness to support the school. To date, the decision has been made to retain the continuity of the existing external support offered by the school improvement partner. This includes a comprehensive data analysis of pupils' performance identifying precise areas for improvement and correctly highlighting concerns in the progress some pupils are making. The brokering of visits to nearby outstanding schools is providing teachers with high quality models on which to base their practice. Support with the writing of the school improvement plan has been well received by the school and correctly identifies the actions needed to drive forward improvements. The school improvement partner is intending to conduct more frequent visits to the school in the future in order to maintain the rigour and drive needed to bring about the improvements necessary at the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cornwall and the Academies Advisers Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Richard Light
Her Majesty's Inspector