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1 November 2013

Mr Brian Banks
Headteacher
Ashurst Primary School
New Glade Hill
Off Chain Lane
Blackbrook
St Helens
Merseyside
WA11 9QJ

Dear Mr Banks

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ashurst Primary School, St. Helens

Following my visit with David Selby Her Majesty's Inspector to your school on 31 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:

- review the school improvement plan so that an overall image of what action must be taken for the school to be good, within an eighteen month timeframe, is absolutely clear
- include more explicitly how senior leaders will monitor and evaluate planned action so that all involved know their role in improving the school and can be held accountable
- discuss with staff the key indicators of successful teaching of mathematics and decide what further action you will take to improve the teaching of mathematics
- use the Ofsted document 'Good governance: Learning from the best' and planned training to enable governors to hold senior leaders to account.

Evidence

During the visit we met with you, your assistant headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a parent governor, the local authority school improvement adviser and six Year 6 pupils. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I looked at samples of pupils' workbooks, records of observations of lessons and work scrutinies.

Context

Since the inspection two teachers have left the school and a new teacher has taken up a position in Year 6. A teacher has returned from maternity leave to take Year 1 and the Year 1 teacher has moved to Year 3. One teacher is absent due to ill health and a supply teacher is covering that class. After the inspection the Chair of the Governing Body and several other governors resigned their position. Five new members joined the governing body and a new Chair of Governors has been appointed.

Main findings

You, your staff and governors have a shared understanding of what the school needs to do to become good. You are determined to raise the performance of the school and, correctly, put improving the quality of teaching as the main focus for your efforts. You have reviewed written guidance for teachers so that they all know what is expected of them in the classroom. You have introduced a model of support and challenge for the introduction of new ideas which involves senior leaders and subject leaders working together. You have prioritised this idea and both groups are in a much better position to spread good practice across the school. You have already conducted lesson observations and given verbal, followed by written, feedback showing clearly what teachers need to do to improve. There is an opportunity to gather this information together and identify individual and collective training needs.

Whole-school attention on teachers' planning and marking is beginning to lead to improvements in the time pupils are given to think for themselves and in the feedback pupils receive about their work. Pupils I spoke to say they are given time at the start of lessons to read the comments made by the teachers, are given help with any misunderstandings and time to respond to these comments. Although this was evident in some of the books I looked at, it is early days and it is not consistent practice throughout the school. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has been altered so that there are set areas for children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers now model how children will use the resources independently so that they can make progress when working without an adult.

You have appointed a new leader of mathematics who has introduced some ideas to improve the quality of mathematics teaching. This includes training for teachers and providing chances for pupils to apply their mathematics skills in other subjects. This was evident in some of the books I looked at. You have introduced a pre-and post-learning activity which enables teachers to more effectively match work to pupils' needs in mathematics. Pupils I spoke to are very keen on this way of working.

The school improvement plan covers the school's most significant needs and reflects your aim to improve the school quickly. However, the plan only covers the first term. It would be useful if you plan the action to be taken over an eighteen month period so that you can plot your progress towards good. Although there is an overall system for monitoring and evaluating planned action you need to decide how senior leaders will be more involved. Furthermore, there is not enough detail about the specific action you will take to improve the teaching of mathematics.

Led by the new, experienced Chair of the Governing Body, governors are ambitious and resolute in their desire to improve Ashurst and put high quality teaching at the forefront of their vision. She has swiftly appointed people with the right skills and expertise to form a strong group of governors who can support and challenge leadership. An external review of governance is complete, an action plan has been agreed and training needs identified. All governors are scheduled to receive training on information about pupils' progress. A post-Ofsted action group has been established and plans to meet regularly.

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 improvement adviser has a clear obligation to support and challenge the school to improve. She has worked with you and the leader for mathematics to share ideas on how to improve this subject. She has organised links with a National Leader of Governance to work with governors. You have formed links with a local Leader of Education who is providing support for you. A local authority consultant teacher has met with your assistant headteacher to discuss provision and the nursery teacher has observed outstanding teaching at another school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for St. Helens and as below.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] – for academies