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Travis Martinson
Horndon-on-the-Hill CofE Primary School
Hillcrest Road
Horndon-on-the-Hill
SS17 8LR

Dear Mr Martinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Horndon-on-the-Hill CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 November 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:

- check the accuracy of teachers' assessments of progress and attainment in mathematics
- set all teachers targets for improvement following lessons observations and follow these up quickly to ensure matters improve
- ensure that pupils have more regular opportunities to write at length and that teachers have high expectations of the amount of writing completed in lessons
- ensure governors regularly monitor records of safeguarding checks to ensure they are up-to-date.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you and other senior leaders. We visited classrooms together. I met with five members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I looked at school documents including improvement plans, records of monitoring activities, and achievement data.

Context

Since the Section 5 inspection one of the teachers has left the school and been replaced by a temporary teacher. The deputy headteacher is teaching full time in Year 6. A part-time inclusion manager now works in the school for two days a week. She is responsible for the provision and progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs; as well as the more able pupils. Two members of the administrative team have left the school. The governing body has reconstituted and has reduced in size from 17 to 12 members. Two further additional governors attend progress board meetings.

Main findings

In the summer 2013 assessments, standards at the end of Year 2 fell to well below average because fewer pupils attained the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6 improved, attainment in writing was broadly similar to that in 2012. Too few pupils attained the higher level 5 in mathematics and writing.

School data indicate that attainment is improving quickly and more pupils are on track to make expected or better progress now. The headteacher and governors have set high expectations for pupils' progress as they progress through their year groups. Teachers are held to account for the progress pupils make, in regular meetings with senior leaders. Pupils who may be falling behind are discussed and strategies are put in place to address underachievement. Leaders also check the progress of the most able pupils and those eligible for the pupil premium funding.

Teachers are helped to make more accurate assessments of writing through regular sessions in school and between schools to verify teachers' judgements. Not enough is done, however, to check that assessments of mathematics are correct.

Leaders have drawn up appropriate improvement plans to address the areas for improvement from the Section 5 inspection. There is not enough clarity however about what specifically needs to improve to raise achievement in mathematics. There is more good teaching now because of training and support including that provided by the local authority. The headteacher observes teaching and learning regularly and provides some useful feedback to teachers. However, he does not set targets for improvement for every teacher that can be checked in follow up observations to ensure matters improve. Leaders check the work in pupils' books

and teachers' lesson plans. They look for evidence that teachers plan for the range of abilities in their classes. They also check for the effectiveness of teacher's marking, which remains inconsistent. The leader for literacy has noted that in some classes pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their writing skills. Teachers' expectations of the amount of writing pupils will complete in their lessons are not always high enough. The scrutiny of pupils' mathematics work showed that some of it is not challenging enough for the more able pupils.

The newly appointed inclusion leader monitors the teaching and progress of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs well. She checks that individual learning plans have appropriate targets and that teachers are taking full responsibility for their progress.

Governors have the appropriate knowledge and skills to monitor the school and challenge leaders robustly. They have improved communications between governors, other leaders, parents and carers. Governors have become more effective. Meetings have been re-organised to ensure a firm focus on school improvement. Governors have a precise understanding of the achievement data they receive. They have also put systems in place to ensure that teachers are rewarded for effective teaching and for their contribution to school improvement. Governors are ambitious and discharge their duties well. However, they do not regularly check that safeguarding records are up to date.

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 is using local authority support well to improve teaching and leadership. The headteacher is supported by a local leader in education. Teachers take opportunities to observe good or better teaching in other schools. Local authority representatives work in the school to improve teaching including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The local authority had established a progress board to monitor closely the impact of the school's improvement plans.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Winter
Her Majesty's Inspector