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25 November 2013

Mrs Anne Tapp
Picknalls First School
Oldfields Road
ST14 7QL

Dear Mrs Tapp

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Picknalls First School

Following my visit to your school on 22 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 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:

- improve the opportunities pupils have to discuss and prepare responses when more challenging questions are being considered
- actively involve pupils more in identifying what they need to do to improve
- ensure the school's challenging targets are more prominently presented in the school's improvement plans
- ensure the minutes of Governing Body's meetings capture the challenge the Governing Body is providing.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. A telephone discussion was also held with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plans, the minutes of the Governing

Body meetings and the school's records of its monitoring of teaching were evaluated. Short visits were also made to eleven lessons to evaluate teaching.

Context

There have been no significant changes in context since the inspection in July 2013.

Main findings

The schools' improvement plans address all the issues identified at the July inspection. These plans are regularly reviewed and indicate that the school is responding quickly to the issues identified. The school has increased the rigour in the regular meetings held to review the progress pupils are making; for instance, more concrete actions are identified in response to evidence that pupils are not making sufficient progress and more interventions are being planned for pupils eligible for the pupil premium. Very challenging targets are being set, although these could be more prominently presented in the school's plans.

The Governing Body, through its curriculum committee, is much more effectively reviewing the information about the progress that pupils are making. More challenging questions are being asked of the school's senior leaders; for instance, the pupils on track to meet the national expectations in every year group and how this compares to national averages and previous performance.

Ahead of issuing further information about pupils' progress, senior leaders have consulted with parents about the information they would like to receive between parents' evenings. Middle leaders are more involved in monitoring the quality of teaching. All staff, including teaching assistants, are taking greater responsibility for ensuring that the evidence of their effectiveness is available, in preparation for performance management meetings. This is helping staff think more deeply about how they must implement further improvements.

The action taken to further improve teaching is impressive and is ensuring that pupils are making better progress in lessons. Teachers are much more regularly reviewing learning in lessons and pupils are being challenged more. Teachers are asking better questions but the value of this is diminished at times because not enough attention is given to enabling them to discuss and prepare responses. Teachers' marking is identifying the strengths and areas that require improvement. Pupils are required to respond to these suggestions but they have limited opportunity to take responsibility for identifying improvements for themselves. The school is well aware of these further development points and has plans in place to address them.

External support

Leaders at all levels spoke positively about the local partnership of first schools that is providing greater access to good practice, training opportunities and efficiencies in purchasing. Although the review of governance is planned, it has not yet taken place. The local authority has provided valued training related to the gifted and talented pupils that is enabling teachers to raise the level of challenge in lessons. Staff are looking forward to the bespoke mathematics training planned for later this year. Any further training should be directed towards the Governing Body to ensure all governors can confidently use assessment information to evaluate the improvements that are taking place.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Child of Children's Services for Staffordshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector