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21 November 2013

Mr A Whittle, Headteacher
Hethersett VC Junior School
22 Queen's Road
Hethersett
Norwich
NR9 3DB

Dear Mr Whittle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hethersett VC Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 20 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:

- extend the action plan, to show how the school will get to good
- make clearer, the roles of all senior and subject leaders in implementing the plan
- give further consideration to the school's presentation policy, involving governors in the process
- ensure that new initiatives designed to improve pupils' learning check their understanding when evaluated, for example learning objectives.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, the literacy and numeracy leaders, four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a

representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school action plan, reviewed monitoring records, scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and teachers' marking, and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work.

Context

Since the inspection, four of the eight teaching staff have been replaced, two permanently as a result of retirement and two temporarily due to maternity leave. Staffing has been reorganised so that an established member of staff is deployed in each year group; three are members of the leadership team. A new headteacher has been appointed to take over when the current headteacher retires at Easter.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have:

- written an action plan that is aligned to the key issues for improvement
- focused more on what pupils are expected to learn when planning lessons
- introduced new 'presentation rules' for pupils to follow and staff to check
- increased writing time in lessons and introduced special books to write in
- started a new handwriting scheme
- developed with staff an agreed approach to marking pupils' work
- introduced reading and homework diaries that involve parents and carers
- started to plan new mathematics approaches with schools locally.

You started to take action immediately after the inspection; improvements are taking effect. However, although the milestones in your action plan ensure that a suitable pace of improvement is maintained this term the lack of longer term targets limit the success of the plan as a 'journey to good'. Your staff have compared examples of pupils' work at the time of the inspection with current work to measure improvement, particularly in literacy and mathematics. This is proving effective, for established staff and those new to the school, who have usefully contributed ideas used in other schools.

Teachers' planning is now more focused on what pupils will learn. However, not all teachers share learning objectives with pupils in clear enough language. As a consequence some pupils are much clearer than others about the purpose of learning, and how to reach higher levels.

You are using progress data more effectively to decide which pupils require additional support. Using the same tracking system as the Infant's School is helping to spot any pupils who are falling behind earlier. This is enabling you to use pupil premium funding more strategically, before pupils reach Year 6.

The literacy and mathematics subject leaders are monitoring the quality of pupils' work more regularly and rigorously. The new reading and homework diaries you have introduced are involving parents and carers more effectively in the process of

recording and reviewing pupils' reading habits and their independent work. However, your action plan does not make clear the roles and responsibilities of all senior and subject leaders in improvement.

Teachers at the school are using the new marking policy. However, although better marking is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' work teachers' comments are not always critical enough. Staff are finding the new 'presentation rules' a useful aid to marking handwriting. The quality of pupils' handwriting is improving, following the introduction of an agreed scheme and special books to write in. There are examples of extended writing inspired by visits that you are rightly planning to develop further. However, there are also some missed opportunities to develop pupils' writing in the context of other subjects, for example in response to an excellent display of art work by Year 3 pupils inspired by Picasso. Overall, there are still inconsistencies in the quality of presentation. Governors are keen to support by helping to refine the policy and by challenging standards that fall short. This exemplifies the clear focus of the governing body on raising expectations and on maintaining, through regular visits, accurate knowledge of the school's work.

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 local authority is providing support relative to the school's needs, for example by ensuring that staff are able to use pupil progress data effectively. Some staff are improving their subject knowledge, for example in mathematics, through professional development provided by the local authority. The school has not participated in the 'Norfolk to Good and Great' initiative yet. The local headteachers' association promotes networking between schools and provides opportunities to hear national speakers.

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