

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566863
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
jbennett@cfbt.com



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Mr Nick Fish
Headteacher
Hensingham Primary School
Main Street
Whitehaven
Cumbria
CA28 8QZ

Dear Mr Fish

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hensingham Primary School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 21 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- review the current improvement plan to ensure that it is firmly focused on improving teaching and classroom practice and that rigorous monitoring is used to support this process and challenge weak teaching
- complete the action plan for governors and ensure that training is provided, as a matter of urgency, to empower governors to be more pro-active in challenging school managers in relation to the extent of progress the school is making towards improving outcomes for pupils
- ensure that a governors' monitoring group is set up to meet regularly with school managers to monitor the actions being taken to speed up improvements
- ensure that key policies, such as the reading policy, are clear in what is expected and that these are applied consistently across the school. For example, teachers need to be clear that 'this is how we teach reading across this school; this is how we teach calculation etc.'
- make sure that the training for teachers is relevant and impact is reflected in improved teaching in the classroom
- involve all subject leaders in providing ideas, suggestions and resources to improve teaching in their areas of responsibility.

Evidence

During the visit meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors as well as with two groups of pupils from Year 3 and Year 6. A meeting was also held with two representatives from the local authority. The school's development plan was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with the headteacher focused on reading. The school's reading policy was also scrutinized.

Context

During the Ofsted inspection in September an Acting Chair of Governors was in post. Since then a new Chair has been elected. There have been no staff changes.

Main findings

The current development plan lacks cohesion and many of the actions planned may be related, but are peripheral, to direct improvement in the classroom. The focus is on actions such as more monitoring, observation of good practice and review of assessment processes, but little indication on how pedagogy is to be improved in the classroom or how teachers are to improve their expertise and subject knowledge. Pupils identified that there has been no noticeable change in the way they are being taught since the inspection. The plan has no sharp, quantitative indicators against which progress can be measured. Equally, several actions lack the precise detail which will support and structure development of classroom practice and lead to real impact. For example, 'providing opportunities for staff to moderate and standardize pupils' work' may lead to awareness of gaps in achievement but will not necessarily impact on developing classroom practice. The pace at which these improvements are to be brought in is also very leisurely and drawn out. For example, improving the quality of observation of lessons by school leaders was one aspect identified in the Ofsted report for improving leadership in the school. However, paired observations with external support are not planned until 'during the spring term', which is far too long a delay. Staff training to raise awareness of outstanding teaching is planned for January, yet there is no indication how this is to be followed up to support teachers to enable them to have an immediate impact in the classroom. There are no links made to coaching or other personal improvement programmes. Essentially, the plan, as it stands, lacks the pace or rigor to directly influence and improve teaching in the classroom in the immediate future.

Although there was a small improvement in the achievement of pupils in national tests in 2013, there is too much inconsistency between classes and from year to year. For example, results for reading at Key Stage 2 had declined in 2013 and were below national averages. However, the phonics screening test (the teaching of letters and the sounds they make) in Key Stage 1 showed outcomes above the national average with those pupils supported by Pupil Premium funding doing especially well. A learning walk through the school with you identified that reading is better supported and managed at Key Stage 1 than at Key Stage 2. Practice also varies from class to class. The school reading policy is strong on ideals but lacks specific guidance and does not identify minimum expectations. For example, Year 3 pupils identified that before they could get onto a higher level book, the expectation was that they read all the books at that level irrespective of whether they found these challenging or not. Surely, if a pupil shows that they are confident in reading at a particular level they should be encouraged to read more challenging text. Checks on what pupils are reading vary from class to class and are especially weak at Key Stage 2. Currently, there is

still a lack of rigor in the way in which this and other policies, such as teaching and learning, are being implemented across the school. These inconsistencies were identified during the recent Ofsted inspection. Behaviour around the school was observed as being good and pupils expressed positive attitudes to learning. However, they did identify that some lessons were, at times, disrupted by a small number of individuals. Governors are supportive but acknowledge that they need further training especially in the use of data and their ability to ask challenging questions. An action plan for governance is in the early stages of development and is, as yet, incomplete. There is a clear desire to improve but the pace at which this is happening is too slow.

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 support provided by the local authority did not enable the school to become good. Since the inspection, the local authority has had a more visible profile with two formal meetings to provide advice on the action plan and discuss support. This has resulted in the brokering of potential support from a local teaching school as well as from the governor development officer. However, this support has not yet been translated into visible action which is shown to be impacting on improving teaching or governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector