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Mr Andrew Dunn
Headteacher
Sunnyside Primary School
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Dear Mr Dunn

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sunnyside Primary School, Middlesbrough

Following my visit to your school on 3 December 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 September 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:

- clarify who is accountable, how, and by when for the actions to raise achievement specified in the school's improvement plan
- strengthen leaders' understanding of how well particular groups of pupils in school are progressing.

Evidence

During the visit meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, several representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plan was evaluated. The school's systems for tracking pupils' progress were considered. The inspector also toured the school with the headteacher and had lunch with pupils in the dining hall.

Context

The school will become an academy in January 2014. It is one of six local schools that will form a cluster of academies, with a shared board to oversee raising achievement.

Main findings

The school's action plan for improvement includes a suitable set of actions to tackle each of the points that were suggested for improvement. However, there is no indication of how the school will know if its actions have been successful. The improvement plan needs to specify how the school will check the impact of its planned actions, with clear 'milestones' as points of progress along the way. These criteria need to be specific, measurable and directly related to raising pupils' achievement. To promote accountability of staff at all levels, the plan needs to say who is responsible for each action.

The school proactively seeks advice and, together with the local authority, has identified opportunities to learn from good practice elsewhere, for example in teaching mathematics. Leaders are improving how they track pupils' progress. They have drawn on the advice of a local special school to enhance the system for tracking the progress of pupils who have special educational needs.

Leaders have established a means of collecting and analysing data on how particular groups of pupils are doing, such as those in mainstream classes, or more able pupils. This has the potential for leaders to be able to use data more smartly, to evaluate how effective teaching is, or what impact their initiatives are having on raising standards. The system needs to be able to show what impact initiatives are having on pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding and this is an area that requires attention.

A prompt start has been made to improving teaching. There have been training sessions since the inspection, led by staff within the school and from the Middlesbrough Teaching Alliance. A programme of staff visits to other schools has begun, to see good practice. Two school review days have been held, involving both teachers and teaching assistants: one on marking, and one an external view of what makes good and outstanding teaching. Staff report that these have raised their awareness of needing to track the progress of all groups of pupils in their classes more closely. They have identified groups of high achieving pupils as a result and have begun to deliver additional lessons and provide more challenging materials for them. Staff enthusiasm for learning from other schools has grown.

Mainstream classes are now organised by ability grouping, especially in Key Stage 2. Notwithstanding, pupils can move flexibly between groups, including the special needs bases, as fits their aptitudes for a particular subject. These grouping arrangements are assisting teachers in planning lessons that increasingly meet the needs of different groups of pupils.

High ability pupils in Year 6 are receiving additional teaching in mathematics and English to help them attain higher levels in the summer 2014 national tests.

These moves have the potential to accelerate the rates of progress pupils make over time.

Senior leaders have begun to sharpen their approaches to monitoring teaching, in order to get greater consistency in how teachers plan and deliver their lessons. However, the checklist being used needs to focus more on identifying what learning has taken place in a lesson and what progress specific groups of pupils are making.

A full curriculum review is planned for January 2014. The move to academy status offers the opportunity to draw further on links with partner schools.

Senior leaders have begun a programme of scrutiny of marking, including 'spot checks' to promote greater consistency across the school. This monitoring role now needs to be extended to middle leaders also, to ensure that they play their part in each subject to raise attainment.

Governors are aware of the steps the school is taking to improve and conscious of their responsibilities. Their visits to school increasingly have a set focus or purpose. As result, they are becoming better informed as to the quality of teaching and the issues the school is tackling.

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 drawing well on the support of the local authority. The local authority review of mathematics in late November 2013 gave clear pointers for further action. Links with other schools and training are beginning to strengthen the skills of leaders and teachers. The good relationships with the authority are helping to maintain the impetus through the next stage of the school's journey as it becomes an academy. Through the links with other schools, a good start has been made to enhancing staff awareness of good and outstanding practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon

Her Majesty's Inspector