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12 December 2013

Anna Hennell James
Headteacher
Halifax Primary School
Prince of Wales Drive
IP2 8PY

Dear Ms Hennell James

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Halifax Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 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 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:

- improve systems for checking pupils' work by making clear your expectation of all middle leaders in the monitoring and evaluation process.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. I evaluated the school's improvement plans and visited classes to see pupils and staff at work. I checked a sample of pupils' work and teachers' marking.

Context

There have been no significant staff changes since the recent inspection which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

The school's improvement plan clearly identifies a range of actions to help the school become good. The plan contains clear, precise and measurable success criteria. Appropriate timescales have been set for senior leaders and governors to review progress.

You have continued to undertake regular lesson observations to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. All teachers have been observed on at least one occasion since the previous inspection and these observations were carried out by two members of the senior leadership team. This helps ensure greater consistency in the judgments made. Overall judgments about the quality of teaching now include appropriate reference to the progress pupils are making.

Senior and middle leaders are making regular checks on teachers' planning and pupils' work. However, whereas the quality of marking and feedback are good in English and mathematics, they are less effective in other curriculum areas. This is because middle leaders have not been told what is expected of them in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of their area of responsibility. Consequently, areas of relative weakness, such as poor quality marking in science books, are not being addressed quickly enough.

The school has taken effective action to raise further the profile of reading. Pupils' success in reading is encouraged and celebrated, with prizes and certificates awarded for the keenest readers. Pupils read to an adult in school more frequently. Attendance is also improving. Attendance figures for the autumn term are significantly better than they were at the same time in 2011 and 2012.

Governors are increasingly well placed to help the school improve rapidly by providing a greater level of challenge to school leaders. The headteacher provides regular informative reports and governors have begun to observe the work of teachers and leaders at first hand. This enables them to consider more confidently reports they receive on the quality of teaching and bring up relevant issues for clarification. Eight governors were recently involved in a learning walk with senior leaders. Those involved found the experience extremely useful as they were able to understand more fully how the school was addressing the areas requiring improvement. The Chair of the Governing Body makes regular visits to the school and has a comprehensive understanding of how the school operates and how well it is doing.

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 has not been actively involved in the school since the inspection. However, it has now recognised the need to provide a greater level of support and challenge to the school. It recently appointed a 'challenge partner' who has begun to work with the school's leadership team.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Tomkow
Her Majesty's Inspector