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Pam Purdon
Headteacher
Howitt Primary Community School
Holmes Street
Heanor
DE75 7FS

Dear Mrs Purdon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Howitt Primary Community School

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection meetings were held with: the headteacher and other senior leaders; a representative of the local authority; members of the governing body; and a group of eight pupils from Key Stage 2. I conducted a tour of the school with you and the assistant headteacher, visiting every class. I looked at a sample of pupils' work from Key Stage 2 and considered the school's most recent data on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated, both of which are now combined into one document.

Context

The governing body has appointed a permanent teacher to replace a part-time member of staff in the Nursery from January 2014. A teacher in Key Stage 1 is

currently on leave and a temporary teacher has been appointed to teach Year 1 pupils for two terms.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You have put in place a programme of checks which enables senior leaders to gather more frequently information from visits to lessons, pupils' books and gathering the views of pupils. Consequently, the rigour with which the quality of teaching is evaluated has improved. Teachers are being provided with more detailed feedback on how to improve their practice and, where appropriate, have observed each other's practice in order to support their development. Your subsequent visits to lessons are helping you to check on the rate of improvement. Your checks show that teachers are responding positively to feedback and are improving aspects of their teaching. For instance, teachers are ensuring that pupils have a better understanding of their learning objectives and are more aware of what they have to achieve by the end of a lesson. In addition, teachers are checking more frequently that boys are engaged in their learning through the use of targeted questions. Furthermore, teachers are ensuring that learning progresses more effectively by challenging pupils to complete their tasks within a set time. This improvement is helping to bring about a greater consistency in the quality of teaching.

You have refined the way in which teachers record their assessments of pupils' learning. As a result, teachers have a better understanding of how to use this information in order to plan a series of lessons which more closely meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs have benefited from the improved use of assessment information as well as to changes to the arrangements for grouping pupils by ability for the teaching of English and mathematics. Teachers are more involved in planning, delivering and checking on the progress of this group of pupils during lessons. This is helping them to make faster rates of progress.

Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not yet benefiting from the increased use of information and communication technology to support them in their learning. This is because not enough resources have been purchased.

Pupils say that the new behaviour code is helping to improve standards of behaviour. This is because pupils are clearer about the tiers of consequences if they choose to misbehave. Pupils say that they are more motivated to behave well in order to achieve weekly rewards.

You have worked effectively with pupils, parents and carers to improve attendance. The number of sessions missed by pupils during the autumn term 2013 has been reduced considerably when compared to the same time last year.

Governors have wasted no time in arranging the external review of governance and they are awaiting the recommendations for improvement. Nonetheless, governors who are responsible for subjects have already commenced a programme of visits to meet with subject coordinators and to check the rate of improvement. Governors acknowledge, however, that they need training to develop their skills in evaluating data relating to pupils' achievements, in order for them to be able to challenge and hold senior leaders to greater account for the school's performance.

Your school improvement plan is aligned to the areas identified for improvement at the last section 5 inspection. The plan clearly sets out a series of actions which are to be undertaken in order to strengthen leadership and improve the quality of teaching. Persons responsible for leading actions, gathering information about their implementation and evaluating the extent to which they have been successful are clearly identified. Although you have clear success criteria relating to pupils' achievements at the end of the academic year, the lack of specific, interim, milestones at the end of each term makes it difficult for governors to be able to gauge the extent to which actions are having a positive impact on pupils' achievements. In particular, this means that governors are unable to check independently the impact of the pupil premium on pupils' progress.

The local authority has acted quickly to put in place support for the school. Teaching and learning consultants have delivered training on the teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Sampling of pupils' books shows that these skills are being taught more systematically in Key Stage 2. The local authority has arranged support from North Wingfield Primary School. This has helped senior leaders to draw up a list of classroom resources which are to be in place in order to support pupils' learning. Teachers are ensuring that pupils are using information displayed on 'working walls' and desk-based resources to help them learn more effectively. The local authority's plan of action is interwoven with the school's own action plan so it is clear to see how support from the local authority is being followed up by the school.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

You and I discussed ways in which the plan should be strengthened through the addition of milestones relating to pupils' achievement.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire. The letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty's Inspector