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Mrs Cheryl Smith
Headteacher
Western Primary School
Cold Bath Road
Harrogate
North Yorkshire
HG2 0NA

Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Western Primary School, North Yorkshire

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 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 October 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 its action plan for improvement to cover a longer period and strengthen it by including specific, numerical targets for how swiftly the rates of progress groups of pupils make will be expected to rise. The school should also ensure that the plan lists key staff responsible for overseeing actions and states how they will know whether these actions have been successful.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement action plan was evaluated. The inspector also consulted other documents, including the school's data on pupils' progress, and sampled recent reports written by those advising the school.

The inspector had lunch in the dining room with pupils.

Main findings

Early impact of the school's improvement plan following the section 5 inspection can be seen in the strengthening capacity of the senior management team to plan strategically for improvement. The senior management team are working effectively together to plan and deliver the actions needed for improvement, under the close direction of the headteacher. The school has identified strong teachers to lead key areas of improvement work around mathematics and literacy. Neither senior leaders nor the governors are complacent about what they need to do.

Through a small monitoring group, senior leaders and governors together check that actions are being implemented as intended. Some positive impact can be seen from actions already completed. For example, the school has established a more accurate baseline for the level of pupils' skills in spelling. This means that teachers are now able to track pupils' progress from the right starting points and can set pupils individual targets for their attainment and progress.

Precise targets for the proportions of pupils meeting and exceeding expected levels of progress, checked at agreed milestone points during the school year, would strengthen the plan as a tool to measure the rate of school improvement. The detailed actions in the plan have proved useful to 'kick start' improvement, but the plan now needs to be simplified so that it is easier for leaders and governors to use. In addition, it only covers the first term in depth and thus needs extending.

Since the inspection, the school's leaders have made some improvements to the ways in which they track pupils' progress. These concentrate more on the rates of progress being made by different groups of pupils, as well as the progress being made by individuals. The impact of these changes means that leaders can see more easily the rates of progress that individual pupils and groups of pupils are making. Teachers are also able to identify more swiftly who is falling behind and how to intervene to support them. For example, extra teaching and split groups for Year 5 and Year 6 have been provided for pupils deemed likely to reach high levels in the statutory assessment tests in mathematics, to boost their rate of progress. This is providing better levels of challenge for those pupils.

The school's refined tracking data show that the pace at which pupils are now progressing is accelerating, although the overall rate of pupils' progress still lags behind national expectations. Recently published data for 2013 show that the progress of those pupils for whom the school receives additional money through the Pupil Premium scheme is also beginning to quicken.

Additional support is provided for pupils who are of lower ability, or who have special educational needs. For these pupils, the school has deployed an extra teacher or assistant to help them to improve their writing. However, the aims of these generalised sessions are not tailored well enough to each child's needs.

Senior leaders are developing their skills in monitoring lessons, to be able to assist the headteacher. They are becoming sharper at using data to set challenging targets and to drive improvement in achievement for groups of pupils. The school has taken effective action to get teaching assistants more closely involved in the planning and monitoring of

pupils' progress, alongside teachers. In this way, teaching assistants are gaining a better understanding of the part they can play in promoting faster progress.

Governors are taking appropriate steps to enable them to be able to offer greater challenge to the school's leaders. For example, they have had training and advice that are helping them to understand data about pupils' progress so that they can ask more probing questions. As a result, governors are beginning to acquire a more accurate picture of pupils' learning and progress. They have been proactive in brokering advice from external sources and work closely with the school's leaders to check that the improvement plan is being implemented.

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 now more engaged in work with the school than in the recent past. It is supporting the school well, where needs have been identified. The school has taken up a number of offers of support made by the local authority, for example to improve mathematics. Subsequently, whole-staff training on teaching mathematics delivered by a member of the school teaching staff is promoting greater consistency in teaching approaches. The local authority input has helped to improve marking in mathematics, so that pupils are clearer about the next steps they need to take.

The school is drawing well on local partner schools through the Red Kite Alliance scheme, for example to strengthen strategic planning; and on the advice of externally-sourced consultants, such as for special educational needs, to improve resources aimed at promoting pupils' engagement in learning.

As a result, senior leaders and other, specialist teachers in the school are beginning to exert a more strategic influence on aspects of school life related to improving achievement. Through these channels the whole staff are developing further their awareness of good practice in teaching. Further links have been established to build on this.

The school would benefit from further support from the local authority to review and simplify its improvement plan along the lines suggested above in this letter.

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

Yours sincerely

Honoree Gordon

Her Majesty's Inspector