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Mrs Maria Davis
Headteacher
Cornfield School, Littlehampton
Cornfield Close
Littlehampton
West Sussex
BN17 6HY

Dear Mrs Davis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Cornfield School, Littlehampton

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2014, 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 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. Leaders should take further action to:

- ensure that all teachers know what they are expected to do to improve the quality of students' writing and fully understand how success will be measured.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, other senior leaders, students and representatives of the Governing Body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan alongside other monitoring documentation. You took me on a tour of the school and I also met separately with a group of students and examined some students' work.

Main findings

Since the inspection that took place in October, leaders have acted promptly and imaginatively to ensure a judgement of good at the next inspection. An urgent challenge, the recruitment of a teacher to lead English has already been successfully achieved. Having advertised and failed to recruit, governors have astutely secured the secondment of a local deputy headteacher whose specialism is English. This prompt action has effectively stabilised the leadership of the subject and enabled governors to re-advertise and take the necessary time to secure a permanent appointment of good calibre.

In order to improve the quality of teaching, leaders have correctly analysed what aspects of teaching require improvement. Training has been provided on questioning and planning for the development of students' reading and writing. Students are now required to bring a book to school and are allotted time every day in which a teacher listens to them read. Students with whom I met felt were proud of the number of books they have read. They welcome the strategy and say they now read far more than they ever did in the past. They also assert that it has helped them improve their reading. Assessment information scrutinised during my visit attests to marked improvements in the reading ages of all but three students.

Students noted the improvements in marking which they find helpful. Since the inspection all teachers are now required to identify in their marking 'what went well' and what could be improved. In lessons students are provided with time to respond to teachers' marking and make corrections. However, not enough progress has been made yet with accelerating the necessary improvements in the quality of students' writing.

Systems for target setting and monitoring students' progress towards them have been strengthened. All teachers are aware of students' targets both personal and academic and leaders observe teaching regularly to check teachers' planning and their use of the information available to them. Where students lag behind, teachers are required to account for the gaps in their progress and take the necessary remedial steps. Students with whom I met knew their targets well. They also welcomed the newly introduced rewards system for achieving well, for example with their reading and in relation to managing their behaviour more effectively.

In order to ensure the reliability of teachers' in-year assessment of students' attainment, leaders have wisely introduced an additional layer of external standardisation and checking. This has been achieved by linking each teacher with an external partner from another school to check the grades awarded and provide an objective view.

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

Since the S5 inspection that took place in October 2013, the local authority has provided well-targeted support. Local authority advisors have led staff training sessions on literacy and writing which has helped leaders to plan next steps effectively. Hands-on practical input to the necessary re-design of the school's systems to set students' targets and monitor their progress towards them has been timely and beneficial. Information systems are now accessible to staff and provide up-to-date information on how well students are progressing.

Teachers would benefit from additional follow-up on the development of writing across all subjects.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Farmer
Her Majesty's Inspector