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Mr Gavin Evans
Headteacher
Hilltop Primary School
Hilltop Road
Frindsbury
Rochester
Kent
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Dear Mr Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hilltop Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 31 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings. 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 November 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and school development plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- increase the effectiveness and impact of senior staff such as the assistant headteachers and key subject leaders, ensuring that they undertake a review of their area of responsibility and draw up clear action plans with measurable short-term and long-term targets.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the two assistant headteachers and the subject leaders for English and mathematics. I also met with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and key subject development plans were evaluated. I also considered records of checks made of the quality of teaching and examples of teachers' lesson planning.

Main findings

The headteacher has a clear understanding of what needs to be improved and is working hard to drive the school forward. At present, senior staff and key subject leaders do not support him effectively enough. Although these senior staff are all experienced in their roles, they have not reacted to the findings of the inspection with sufficient urgency or incisiveness to drive improvement in their areas of responsibility. As a result, improvement since the section 5 inspection has not been fast enough.

Middle leadership was an area deemed to require improvement at the recent section 5 inspection. The headteacher has redefined the roles of senior staff and has given them time to carry out additional checks on the quality of pupils' work and teachers' planning. However, senior staff have not used these increased opportunities for monitoring to best effect. Their feedback to staff accentuates positives and does not give clear guidance on what needs to be improved. They do not agree next steps with teachers or set deadlines and they do not always go back and check to see whether teachers have made changes to their practice.

Senior staff do not have enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their area of responsibility. As a result, their development plans are not sharp enough. There are no clear aims or measurable short-term or long-term targets so that governors can judge whether actions have been successful in improving outcomes for pupils. Impact reports to the headteacher mainly describe the activities that have taken place and give very little evaluation of progress.

A structured programme of governor visits helps to ensure that the governing body knows the school well. Governors know what the headteacher is trying to achieve and are very supportive. They acknowledge that there are still barriers to overcome if the school is to improve quickly and securely.

HMI will return to the school at the end of February to carry out a further monitoring visit.

External support

The headteacher welcomes support from external agencies and has already established a good working relationship with the recently appointed school challenge and improvement leader (SCIL) from the local authority. The SCIL has visited the school three times since December and has a clear plan for her support over the coming months.

The headteacher is also keen to develop strong links with other schools. A recently established link with a local academy has already enabled staff to access useful training courses.

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

Yours sincerely

Melanie Knowles

Her Majesty's Inspector