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14 February 2014

Mrs S Cornall
Headteacher
Highfield Primary School
Wright Street
Chorley
Lancashire
PR6 0SP

Dear Mrs Cornall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Highfield Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 13 February 2014, 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.

Having considered the evidence you made available I am of the opinion that 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:

- refine school development planning in order to clarify what the long term strategy is for improving the school
- make sure that the success criteria, in the school development plan, enable senior leaders and governors to measure the impact of the actions being taken to improve the school
- provide even greater challenge to more able pupils when teaching writing. So that these pupils are given greater freedom to be creative and use their imaginations.

Evidence

During this visit, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher and a class teacher. I also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a group of Year 6 pupils. I scrutinised the school development plan, the minutes of the meetings of the school effectiveness committee and the work in a range of books from pupils in Years 1 to 6. My examination of pupils' books enabled me to evaluate the standard of teachers' marking and the quality of pupils' writing. I examined senior leaders' records of the quality of teaching and staff evaluations of their visits to one of your partner schools, St George's Church of England Primary School, to observe good practice. You also accompanied me on a tour of the school where I had the opportunity to meet your colleagues and observe children at work on a range of activities related to literacy.

Context

Since the most recent inspection governors have made two permanent appointments to the senior leadership team. One of your colleagues has been appointed to the post of deputy headteacher. She will be joined by an assistant headteacher during the summer term. The governors have reviewed the arrangements for monitoring the welfare and progress of pupils with special educational needs and as a result a new special educational needs coordinator will be in post after the Easter holiday. The school has made effective links with two local successful schools and the headteacher of one of those schools, a National Leader of Education, is the Chair of the Governing Body.

Main findings

The school development plan is detailed and the priorities in it are explicitly linked to the areas for improvement identified in the most recent inspection report. The actions to address each of the priorities are specific and time scales are appropriate. However, senior leaders' planning only covers a period of one term and as a result it is unclear what the long term strategy for improving the school is over the next two to three years. In addition some of the success criteria, by which senior leaders and managers measure the success of the actions taken to improve the school, are not sharp enough. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity as to the intended impact of these actions on pupils' outcomes.

Senior leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. This has been gained as a result of regular and robust monitoring of the quality of teachers' classroom practice, the standard of work in pupils' books and rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress. You have identified those colleagues in need of additional support to improve their teaching and put in place plans to help them. The school's monitoring records show that there is no inadequate teaching in the school, with much teaching that is good and some even better than that.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in line with school policy. Teachers' comments provide pupils with clear information about what they have done well and, just as importantly, what they need to do to improve their work. The pupils I spoke with valued their teachers' advice about how to make their work better and the opportunities they are given, in 'fixit time', to make the necessary corrections. Evidence in pupils books shows that teachers' marking is making an effective contribution to pupil's progress, this is certainly the case in writing.

Senior leaders' drive to improve the quality of pupils' writing, identified as an area for improvement at the time of the inspection, is having a positive impact. For example in Year 6 pupils' books there are some good examples of imaginative writing. Pupils use a range of sentences to extend ideas and hold the reader's interest. However, in some books there is evidence that the pupils have been given a detailed structure to follow when composing a piece of text. Although this has helped speed up the progress of lower and middle ability pupils it has lowered the demand on those of higher ability, reducing their opportunities to be more creative.

Pupils' progress is rigorously monitored with data on their performance collected every half-term. This enables senior leaders and class teachers to identify quickly those pupils who are not meeting their targets and support them to get back on track.

The turbulence in senior leadership at the time of the recent inspection has been resolved. Key appointments have been made to the senior leadership team and the new, permanent team will be in place at the start of the summer term. Training is being effectively targeted at improving the professional practice of the school's subject leaders. As a result these colleagues are increasingly able to make reliable judgements about the quality of the teaching they observe and the standard of the work in pupils' books. This assists senior leaders in holding staff robustly to account for the quality of their work.

The standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body meet regularly to monitor the school's progress against the priorities in the school development plan. Committee members provide an appropriate balance between supporting senior leaders in their work to improve the school and checking that actions they take are being effective. However, governors are aware that minutes of meetings sometimes do not include enough detail about how governors' challenge senior leaders.

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's effective support for the school helped senior leaders and governors take the necessary actions, which resulted in the removal of special measures at the November 2013 inspection. The local authority has brokered effective links with two neighbouring successful schools. These links have strengthened governance at Highfield and also enabled the school's staff to learn from their colleagues about what works best in the classroom. The local authority firmly believes that the school is well placed to continue its journey of improvement and as a consequence are now only providing light touch support.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry

Her Majesty's Inspector