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Mrs Linda Williams
Headteacher
Abbey Hulton Primary School
School Road
Abbey Hulton
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffordshire
ST2 8BS

Dear Mrs Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Abbey Hulton Primary School, Stoke-On-Trent

Following my visit to your school on 3 March 2014, 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 December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders and with the Chair of the Governing Body. I also met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plans were evaluated. I considered information about pupils' progress and records from school leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching. In addition I looked at minutes from meetings of the governing body.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection the deputy headteacher has returned from maternity leave. One teacher has resigned from a leadership role and is now working as a class teacher. A parent governor has resigned. The governing body now has 5 vacancies.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved in order for the school to be judged as good at the next inspection. You are working together effectively as a leadership team and have a shared determination to ensure that Abbey Hulton quickly becomes a good school. You have carefully considered the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report and your action plans set out how you intend to make the necessary improvements. Your plans are detailed and thorough but are lengthy and information is sometimes duplicated. We agreed that a short summary plan would be valuable in enabling all staff and governors to have a shared understanding of the main priorities.

You have rightly focussed your attention on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement. There are well established and clear systems for the regular monitoring of teaching and learning, including observing lessons and checking the work in pupils' books. Regular meetings are held with class teachers to discuss pupils' progress and identify, and plan support for, those pupils who are not making enough progress. The combined information from these monitoring activities should now be used to inform school leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching within each key stage and across the school. This information will also assist you in planning support and further training for individual teachers.

Systems for managing and evaluating information about pupils' attainment and progress have been updated. The attainment and progress of different classes and groups of pupils is now carefully analysed and is used to target support for those pupils who need additional help. Leaders should now use the information collected to assess how well pupils are progressing from their different starting points.

Since the inspection, the school marking policy has been updated. Teachers' marking in mathematics is now beginning to provide pupils with better feedback about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are also being given more opportunities to respond to teachers' comments and so improve their work. You are also developing the use of individual pupil targets so that pupils are clear about what they have achieved and about what they need to improve.

Within mathematics, you are updating your policy on the ways that calculation methods are taught. Training is being provided for teachers to ensure that the use of these agreed methods becomes more consistent and effective across the school. You are also ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematics knowledge and skills in problem solving. However, this work is in its early stages and further training is necessary for teachers to ensure that these activities are planned and taught effectively.

In addition to the focus on improving pupils' achievement in mathematics, school leaders have, quite rightly, continued to drive improvement in the teaching of reading and writing. As a result, increasing numbers of pupils are making at least expected progress in these subjects in most year groups.

An external review of governance has been carried out very recently, as recommended in the section 5 inspection. The report written following the review rightly recommends that governor recruitment should be a high priority, as there are currently only 7 governors and 5 vacancies. The review also found that governors are not always clear about their roles and responsibilities. Agendas do not always focus on the most important issues. Minutes of meetings sometimes lack detail, although they have recently begun to provide evidence of governors asking questions and beginning to hold school leaders to account. The local authority is supporting the school in trying to recruit new governors and in making improvements to the clerking arrangements. Governors recognise that improvement is required and are keen to attend relevant training to develop their expertise.

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 has commissioned the support of a successful headteacher from a local school (a Local Leader of Education). In addition, a representative of the local authority will make termly visits to carry out reviews of teaching and learning. This support is in its early stages and impact is not yet evident.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Stoke-On-Trent.

Yours sincerely

Morag Kophamel

Her Majesty's Inspector