

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mrs Beverley Stell
Headteacher
Sheriff Hutton Primary School
West End
Sheriff Hutton
York
North Yorkshire
YO60 6SH

Dear Mrs Stell

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

Following my visit to your school on 4 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.

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:

- ensure that senior leaders are prompt and decisive in addressing any areas of continuing underperformance
- ensure that the marking policy is implemented consistently across the school, in order to promote pupils' achievement, by helping them to understand the next steps they need to take.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, middle leaders for literacy and for mathematics, six representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. The inspector toured the school with the headteacher, observing learning briefly in each class and spoke to some pupils in lessons. The inspector also talked to a few pupils over lunch in the school dining hall. The inspector looked at a number of documents, including the headteacher's analysis of the impact of actions taken thus far; the local authority's support plan for the school; the record of monitoring activities undertaken by governors; and a sample of minutes of recent meetings held by the governing body.

Context

One of the three class teachers was absent at the time of this monitoring inspection.

Main findings

Actions taken by school leaders have begun to improve teaching. Where staff underperformance has been identified, individual support plans have been implemented. This has resulted in some improvement in teachers' skills. The quality of teaching needs to strengthen further in order to accelerate pupils' progress.

Governors are bringing strong challenge to the school, drawing helpfully on the educational background and expertise on the governing body, for example in developing literacy. Following visits to other schools to observe good practice, coaching by staff from these schools and by advisers in the local authority, teachers have begun to address areas of weakness. Lesson plans and activities seen during this monitoring inspection visit are becoming more sharply focused on setting tasks that stretch different groups of pupils. During brief visits to classrooms the inspector observed staff intervening directly with individual children at appropriate points to question or challenge them further and not letting learning drift.

As lessons are being pitched at a more appropriate level, pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are improving. Incidents of low level disruption and inattention are reported to be falling. The inspector noted that the environment is being developed well to support learning.

As a result of working with other schools in a local 'cluster group', the skills of the middle leaders for literacy and numeracy are strengthening. These leaders have a clear understanding of their roles in bringing about improvement. Working closely with governors linked to their area of responsibility and guided by the headteacher, they have implemented several initiatives aimed at improving pupils' skills in literacy and mathematics. During this monitoring inspection, the inspector observed first-hand evidence that the literacy policy was being implemented, with an emphasis on getting pupils involved in writing in each lesson. Pupils were observed writing at length, and controlling their handwriting well. Pupils show a keen interest in presenting their written work well. Examples of their work are prominently displayed. These are positive indicators that the revamped literacy policy is beginning to have an impact on pupils' achievement.

Initiatives include a structured programme for improving pupils' spelling. The school has established the starting point for each pupil and which spellings each child has to master to move forward. Crucially, the school is ensuring that parents are fully involved in this, for example through workshops advising them how to help their children in understanding spelling rules and mathematics. The school has wisely freed up extra time for middle leaders to help them fulfil their role in monitoring the quality of teaching more effectively.

In order to develop pupils' mathematical skills further, school leaders have conducted a check on where pupils are being given opportunities to apply these skills in other subjects. This shows reasonable coverage, but the school now plans to increase the frequency and range of occasions when this is possible. Teachers have started to collect evidence to show more easily where and how pupils' mathematical skills are being applied in other subjects.

The school's action plan has been suitably amended to address the areas where the school needs to improve. Link governors are contributing well to school improvement work by giving sharply-focused, well-judged advice to middle managers. Middle leaders and some members of the governing body have conducted a scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work in mathematics and literacy and identified that the policy for marking is not being followed fully in all subjects.

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 school is drawing well on the support provided by the local authority, including the support and advice it is securing through a cluster of six local primary schools. Links with other schools are helping to improve the skills of teachers and of middle leaders. The initiatives that have resulted from the links with other schools are having a positive impact on pupils' handwriting. The local authority is now providing more effective, targeted support and the school is addressing underperformance in teaching in a more systematic way.

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