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Helen Hutchings
Headteacher
Highwood Primary School
Loves Green
Highwood
Chelmsford
CM1 3QH

Dear Mrs Hutchings

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Highwood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 6 March 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 January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

With the support of governors you taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- consolidate the skills of subject leaders so that they contribute to improving teaching, learning and assessment across the full range of subjects
- systematically track each individual pupil so that gaps and strengths in learning are identified promptly, needs are met fully and progress from their starting point is accelerated.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, two subject leaders and four teaching assistants. I met the local authority adviser and two governors. I also spoke to your education consultant. I evaluated the schools' post-Ofsted action plan and other documentation. We carried out brief visits to lessons and spoke to teachers and pupils about their work.

Main findings

After the inspection, with the support of staff and governors, you took the necessary steps to draw up a post-Ofsted action plan and tackle the weaknesses quickly. Improvements are already noticeable, for example in the approach to the teaching of phonics and the detailed lesson planning showing teachers' higher expectation. The teaching assistants told me that they are very clear about what they need to do to support pupils. Pupils are given more opportunities to find things out for themselves to develop their eagerness to learn. Some pupils told me that they had noticed their work was now more difficult and that they were '*learning more things*' in lessons. In the Amethyst class, pupils clearly explained to me how the teacher was insisting on better presentation in exercise books and they were proud to show me their work. As we walked round the school, I saw that reading now has a much higher profile with access to book corners in all classrooms. I was able to observe good levels of challenge in the Opal class when pupils were explaining their work to others. The way the outdoor space was used by the youngest children to consolidate their mathematical vocabulary was also very productive.

In this small school, you recognise that it is important for staff to share effective practice with colleagues who have similar roles. Your subject leaders are having these opportunities but they need to consolidate their leadership skills quickly to improve teaching and learning across all subjects. Their assessments must be based on the systematic tracking of each individual pupil to identify gaps in learning and extend the learning of those who already have high levels of knowledge. This bespoke approach should accelerate progress across the full range of subjects.

Strengths in the governance of the school are being maintained and governors are actively working to improve the website. They drive improvement through their regular '*reflection*' meetings to review progress on each key priority. You are tackling weaknesses with determination and systems are in place to check the quality of teaching. You are ensuring that monitoring is frequent and helpful to staff.

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 welcomes the support and challenge that the education consultant provides. The local authority is also available for additional support. Links with other schools in your locality group enable staff to share effective practice and you belong to a range of useful networks.

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

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector