

15 March 2014

Mrs Lou Reck
Headteacher
Down Hall Primary School
Brooklyn Drive
Rayleigh
Essex
SS6 9LW

Dear Mrs Reck,

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Down Hall Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 12 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 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 plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- sharpen the action plan so that it shows clearly how the school will tackle each of the areas for improvement. Include processes to enable leaders, including the governing body, to gain a more accurate understanding of how well actions are addressed and pupils' progress is improving in reading, writing and mathematics
- ensure teachers receive feedback that gives clear guidance on how well their teaching enables pupils to make progress in their learning.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection and I spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. I visited every class with you and the deputy headteacher; I spoke to pupils and looked at their books. I evaluated your action plan, scrutinised minutes of meetings, information about pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics and records of the monitoring of teaching and learning.

Context

Since the inspection, two teachers have left and another has returned to the school. The contract of a part-time teacher has been extended to full-time.

Main findings

The school action plan has been rewritten to take account of the inspection findings. Although the most important areas for improvement are identified within the plan, it is not precise. It does not specify tightly enough how and when improvement will be brought about or how progress against these key areas will be checked and measured.

Records of key meetings of staff and of senior leaders show these meetings are not sharply aligned with the key areas requiring improvement or the action plan. As a result, actions lack the necessary rigour to bring about the change needed rapidly. Although you have established baseline expectations for the progress you want all pupils to make across the school, records of meetings where pupil progress is discussed do not identify in enough detail the actions that will be undertaken to accelerate the progress of pupils who are underachieving. Your systems do not hold teachers fully to account for this.

You have ensured teachers with leadership responsibilities are monitoring teaching and checking pupils' work in books so their skills are improving. Feedback to teachers about the quality of their work does not however, pay enough attention to the progress pupils make or to how well the teaching meets the needs of different groups of pupils. New systems for encouraging staff to review their practice using videos of themselves teaching or by making short visits to each other's classes have the potential to improve the quality of teaching but they are not focused well enough on making a difference to the key improvement priorities.

Ably supported by the deputy headteacher, you are implementing improved expectations of teaching. Staff are learning from visits to other schools and specific training is in place to support individuals to improve. Classroom environments are more orderly and 'working walls' are used to give pupils guidance about their work. Where standards in these areas of work do not meet the expectations you have set, you have implemented tight timeframes for individual staff by which you expect

requirements to be met, this rigour is not matched in other important aspects of improvement work. You have developed agreed approaches to marking pupils' work in writing and mathematics and to ensuring pupils have more opportunities to write at length. You are developing systems for improving the way pupils' learning targets are used and have shared these with parents. This work is at an early stage and your plans do not show sufficiently rigorous monitoring to ensure actions make a difference to pupils' learning.

The deputy headteacher is leading mathematics effectively; a number of actions have been taken to improve pupils' understanding of how they can solve mathematical problems. These involve different year groups in displaying work and setting challenges for the whole school. As a result, there is better understanding of how problem solving strategies are used; these skills are not used frequently enough in mathematics lessons.

Because the action plan does not clearly identify how governors can monitor improvement against the most important priorities, they are not well enough informed about the progress the school is making so do not provide precise challenge. The Chair is currently exploring with governors from other schools, the most effective ways this can be done.

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

Support brokered by the local authority in the autumn term has not sufficiently improved the quality of the school's planning and monitoring. Because of continuing concerns, the local authority has intensified its work and has implemented a shadow improvement board to monitor improvement, increase the rigour of leadership and sharpen the challenge provided by governors. Training is being provided for teachers and the Chair of Governors is working with a governor from another school to improve processes for monitoring the school's work.

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

Yours sincerely

Prue Rayner
Her Majesty's Inspector