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Mrs Kirsty Reilly
Headteacher
Riverdale Primary School
Hambleton Avenue
Redcar
North Yorkshire
TS10 4HH

Dear Mrs Reilly

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Riverdale Primary School, Redcar and Cleveland

Following my visit to your school on 2 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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.

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 pupils are challenged in their learning from the outset rather than through an optional, 'bolt-on' activity at the end of a lesson
- share the best practice evident within the school more widely across all classes so that teachers can develop their skills alongside colleagues
- ensure that the ambitious targets set within the school development plan are broken down into smaller steps across the year so that governors can check more clearly if new initiatives are making a discernible enough difference to pupils' progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, four members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school development plan, the checks made on the quality of teaching and recent information about pupils' progress. You accompanied me on a learning walk, visiting each class within the school.

Context

Two members of staff remain on long-term absence; one is leaving the school after Easter. These classes are being covered internally and through a supply teacher. One teacher is due to return from maternity leave at the end of April.

Main findings

Although disappointed by the outcome of the January inspection, you have quickly realised that increases in pupils' achievement have to be sustained over time and that this is reliant upon a more consistent quality of teaching. While in the past you have been focused on pupils making the progress expected of them, there is now acknowledgement among all leaders, including governors, that this is not enough; emphasis is now firmly focused on enabling all pupils to exceed expectations. As such, the level of challenge within lessons has been a focus of recent staff training. In some classes, this has come to reflect an extension activity – an additional, 'bolt-on' task to complete once other work has been finished. You agree that this does not reflect the need for consistent levels of challenge throughout a lesson. Tasks should be planned so that they are challenging to pupils from the outset. This would negate the need for teachers to have something else 'up their sleeve' for those who finish quickly.

You have supported middle leaders well to hone their skills of evaluation so that they can accurately judge the impact of actions within their subject. Joint observation and work scrutiny, together with a careful watch on pupil progress information, is giving leaders a well-rounded view of the quality of teaching and its impact over time. All leaders have recognised that partnership working with other schools has supported them in recognising best practice and seeing their subject with fresh eyes. As we discussed, it is now important for staff to work together more collaboratively, including in each other's classrooms, so that the ideas and best practice they are bringing back can be developed at good speed and make sufficient difference to pupils' learning. You recognise that there is already a growing source of best practice within school that now needs to be shared more widely.

Governors are becoming sharper-edged. A new school improvement committee has been assembled, link governors have been assigned to each school priority and they have a more visible presence around the school through a developing programme of visits to class. The level of challenge they extend to you and other leaders is increasing as their awareness of school initiatives develop and they gain in confidence to ask more pertinent questions. However, while governors are aware of your ambitious targets for each year group overall, they are less sure about whether the school is on-track to reach them at key intervals across the year. This is because school development planning does not break down overall targets into smaller steps. As such, governors cannot challenge you as effectively as they would like, especially about whether actions are making a fast and discernible enough difference to the progress pupils make.

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 brokered effective support through the Redcar and Marske Teaching Alliance. This has allowed you and your staff to work alongside a range of good or better schools to improve practice. Pupils are already benefitting from improvements to teaching as a result of this partnership working. As stated above, staff now need time to work together to share what they have learned from their best practice visits so that they can capitalise fully on the range of ideas they now wish to trial in their own classrooms.

You have expressed an interest in attending an Ofsted '*getting to good*' seminar in the future. This is currently being arranged for the summer term.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston
Her Majesty's Inspector