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Mrs Jackie Woodhead
Headteacher
Highcliffe Primary School
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North Yorkshire
TS14 8AA

Dear Mrs Woodhead

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

Following my visit to your school on 1 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:

- review the calculation policy so that staff have a more confident understanding of how key mathematical concepts develop across the school
- ensure the targets set in the school development plan enable governors to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress over time
- work with the local authority to quickly initiate the planned support from a good or outstanding school with a proven track record of improving mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, a group of senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated a range of documents, including the school development plan and the most recent information about pupils' progress. You also accompanied me on a learning walk to each class to observe the teaching of mathematics.

Context

One teacher remains absent from school and is being covered by a long-term supply teacher. There is one vacancy on the governing body for a parent governor.

Main findings

Actions started before the January inspection are beginning to bear fruit; the quality of teaching is improving and pupils' progress has hastened. Most notably, staff are more focussed on what constitutes good or better teaching and appreciate the opportunities to work alongside colleagues, trial new approaches and discuss their impact on pupils' learning. This is motivating staff to give of their best and push for higher standards in their work and, importantly, is keeping teaching and learning at the very heart of the school's agenda. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching in mathematics still lags behind that of reading and writing because staff are less secure in their understanding of how key concepts progress from term-to-term and across year groups in this subject. This is preventing pupils' progress from rising at a quicker pace. As we discussed, reviewing the school's calculation policy will provide a useful starting point for clarifying aspects of teachers' subject knowledge and reinforcing agreed 'non-negotiables' for effective practice in mathematics.

You have worked quickly to strengthen the skills of middle leaders, including through a working party to collectively address the whole-school priority of mathematics. This is making it every leader's business to improve, regardless of their subject responsibility, and has strengthened everyone's appreciation of how mathematics can be meaningfully promoted in other areas of the curriculum. Leaders are also strengthening their skills in monitoring the quality of teaching in their subjects and are increasingly holding each other to account for the progress pupils make. There is clear acknowledgement among all staff that accountability measures are based on how they typically perform in the classroom, day-to-day, as evidenced through pupil data, observations and work in pupil books, rather than their grade after a one-off, planned observation. However, as yet, the targets set within the school improvement plan do not reflect this wider evaluation of evidence when reporting on the current quality and impact of teaching. This risks giving too rosy a view, especially to governors, of how far teaching still has to go in order for the school to become good or better within the next 24 months.

Governance has strengthened. A small sub-group of governors meet weekly to review the school development plan, under the guidance of the local authority link officer. This is allowing them to hone their skills of evaluation, especially when looking at pupil achievement data, and, in turn, enabling them to pose greater challenge to you through more astute questioning. Governors have rightly commissioned reports from middle leaders so that they can keep up-to-date with key developments, particularly around the peer coaching model of support and the use of additional funding. All governors are keen to improve their skills further and acknowledge that adaptations to the school development plan, as described above, would allow them to be even more challenging in their approach.

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

You have recently observed teaching jointly with the school's link officer. She is well aware of the issues facing the school and has initiated action, drawing on specialist expertise. The local authority intends to sustain its regular review of the school's progress and effectiveness, particularly in mathematics; a second round of observations have already been planned to follow-up on recommendations made earlier in the term.

The school is also benefiting from the guidance of other schools within the East Cleveland Cooperative Trust and there is the potential for further brokered support, specifically in mathematics, by a Local Leader of Education. This should be initiated quickly, in partnership with the local authority, so that staff can gain maximum benefit from observing the very best practice outside of their own school.

You have expressed an interest in attending an Ofsted '*getting to good*' seminar. This is in the process of 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