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Gary Martin
Headteacher
Highfield Hall Primary School
Highfield Lane
Chesterfield
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Dear Mr Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Highfield Hall Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 7 April 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 February 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 all members of staff are fully aware of the strategies required to increase pupils' progress
- improve the quality of marking, particularly in terms of giving pupils extra challenge where necessary
- amend the school action plan so that it lists milestones and members of staff involved more clearly, particularly those evaluating impact.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, two representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. You took me on a tour of the school and we made brief visits to every class.

Main findings

You reacted to the findings of your recent inspection by quickly creating an action plan which specifically addresses each area of development. Some of your improvement work is already underway, though the plan itself will be more effective when clearer milestones to review progress are added, along with listing those individuals responsible for evaluating impact.

You have changed the way you track pupil progress. This means that you, your teachers and your governors have more information about pupil achievement. You can now monitor rates of progress towards meeting end of key stage targets as well as single year targets. There are now increased targets for those pupils you have identified as having good potential to exceed expected progress.

After your inspection, you observed the practice of every teacher in the school. Your process for monitoring the quality of teaching through lesson observations has been made more rigorous. It now links more clearly to the progress made by pupils. It is too early to judge the impact of this change.

Teachers have had training on better meeting the needs of the most able pupils in writing lessons. There is awareness that the level of challenge needs to increase for all pupils, for example, in the sophistication of the questions that pupils are asked and more thought-provoking comments being made in marking. However, specific strategies for increasing the level of challenge for pupils have not yet been made clear to members of staff, though you have plans to do so.

You acknowledge that your marking policy is not being fully adhered to by all staff, though there are examples of good practice in this area. Better use needs to be made of time given to pupils to respond to marking, which can only be effective if there is something worthy to respond to. Marking is regularly carried out but lacks the extra challenge which would best help pupils to progress.

Most of your teachers with responsibility for subjects have had training to make them more effective leaders. All of them have been directed to create action plans for their areas which detail how they, as individuals, are going to have an impact on increasing pupil progress in their areas.

The full governing body met immediately after the inspection to discuss the findings and to decide how best to address your school's areas for development. Governors now realise that they need to be more focused on pupil progress. A group has been convened specifically to review progress made against the school's new action plan. This will take place on a monthly basis. A governor who is a former primary headteacher has delivered training on writing for members of staff. Governors are committed to helping the school improve; an external review of governance to help them do this has been arranged for the summer term.

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

Based on the judgement of your recent inspection, your local authority has increased the amount of support available to you. Your local authority representative is committed to making several visits to the school in the summer term. After your inspection, your local authority representative visited the school and commented on your action plan. He has arranged an external review of governance by a National Leader of Education.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector