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9 May 2014

Louise Shuttleworth
Headteacher
Featherstone Wood Primary School
Featherston Road
Stevenage
SG2 9PP

Dear Miss Shuttleworth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Featherstone Wood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 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.

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 teaching and learning is consistently good or better in all classes
- improve the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, middle leaders with responsibility for literacy and numeracy, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The action plan was evaluated. I looked at pupils' progress data, the latest monitoring reports that check the performance of the school and its governance.

I also had a tour of the school to observe teachers working with pupils in all classes and review the quality of marking in their literacy and numeracy books.

Context

A permanent deputy headteacher has been appointed for the start of this term.

Main findings

Under your clear and well-directed leadership the staff and governors are quickly tackling the issues from the last inspection. Your monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and well-organised. Lesson observations clearly identify teachers' strengths and areas for improvement. These are considered carefully alongside progress data to assist you in making judgments about the overall quality of teaching within the school. Analysis of the latest progress data indicates a continuing trend of improvement in reading, writing and mathematics as a result of these improvements in teaching.

A comprehensive action plan provides you with an effective structure with which to push forward rapid improvement. It clearly identifies who will lead each action, when each should be completed and who will monitor the impact of these actions. The specific targets linked to pupil progress and timescales ensures that governors and yourself, can measure the progress the school is making effectively.

You have been quick to implement new management structures and delegate clear roles and responsibilities to senior and middle leaders. Staff have responded well to this increased level of accountability. They regularly monitor the progress that pupils are making within their subjects and now play a greater role in school improvement. For example, a detailed policy has been introduced to ensure consistency in how pupils are taught the most efficient methods to calculate their answers in numeracy.

Discussions with yourself, talking to pupils and scrutiny of their books, confirms that pupils' achievement in literacy and numeracy is improving across the school. Teachers' marking clearly identifies what pupils have done well and what they need to improve next. In the best examples such as in Year 3, pupils are provided with further challenges to accelerate learning at a more rapid pace. Pupils say that they value these extra challenges. However, this high quality marking is not present in all year groups because teachers' comments do not always set extra tasks to consolidate learning and eliminate misconceptions.

My discussion with several governors confirms they possess a good understanding of what the school needs to do next to tackle the issues from the last inspection. They are well organised and actively involved in monitoring the impact of school initiatives and the performance of leaders and staff. The recent external review confirms that the governing body makes effective use of pupil premium funding and that statutory requirements are fully met.

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

Good use of local authority advisors and improvement officers has been made by you and the governors to tackle previous weaknesses in your quest for further school improvement. You have made good use of expertise within a local educational partnership to support staff development. Recent training for staff has given them the confidence to design and teach more creatively in readiness for the new National Curriculum changes.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector