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Ian Robson
Acting Headteacher
Holmgate Primary School and Nursery
Holmgate Road
Clay Cross
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Dear Mr Robson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holmgate Primary School and Nursery

Following my visit to your school on 16 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 March and 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:

- sharpen up improvement plans to make a clear distinction between monitoring and evaluation roles and responsibilities
- further develop the school's target-setting strategy to raise expectations especially of the more-able at Key Stage 2
- strengthen the role of subject leaders so that they can carry out monitoring and quality assurance work more effectively
- improve the role of governance further by enlisting specific support and guidance from the local authority

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders in charge of English and mathematics, the special educational needs coordinator, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated and pupils' assessment information was scrutinised. The lead inspector visited all classrooms with the acting headteacher, during which pupils were spoken to and their work in books viewed.

Context

Since the last inspection the acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher have swapped their positions of responsibility. A Key Stage 1 teacher has left the school. Two members of staff have joined the governing body and two community governors have been recruited. 4 teaching assistants have increased their working hours at the school.

Main findings

The acting headteacher and deputy headteacher have wasted no time in putting together a robust plan of action after a full consultation with all staff and governors. This action plan addresses the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 report. These two senior leaders make a good team and have led the school with clear and transparent aims and aspirations. The activities on the plan rightly focus on improving the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement. However, the plans do not separate the monitoring and evaluation roles clearly; without this distinction, activities to check and quality assure the work of the school cannot be as effective as it should be.

Work done so far to improve the quality of teaching at Early Years Foundation Stage is already beginning to have a positive effect in children's outcomes: 59% are now reaching expected developmental targets compared to 14% last year. Much training has been undertaken to address the level of challenge in lessons; progress at Key Stage 2 is predicted to improve compared to last year. Evidence seen in the classroom and the school's own monitoring indicate that teachers are planning more effectively to meet the different needs of pupils, especially boys. However, the current whole school target-setting approach does not build in high enough expectation for pupils especially at Key Stage 2. Consequently, not all pupils are always encouraged to reach their full potential.

Subject leaders are improving their effectiveness, although they are not skilled enough to carry out lesson observations and other quality assurance work. They have contributed to ensuring greater consistency in the quality of marking and feedback through regular book scrutiny checks. Pupils at Key Stage 2 report that they find the 'challenge' questioned helpful to improve their understanding. Subject leaders work together more effectively. Their contribution to pupils' progress meetings has helped to understand strengths and weaknesses in their respective areas of responsibility and made them more accountable for pupils' progress.

Governance of the school is improving. The Chair of the Governing Body and other experienced members have reorganised the committee structure in order to support and challenge the school more effectively. They have drawn upon the knowledge and expertise amongst themselves to improve their practice but have not received guidance and advice from any external consultancy. Consequently, they have not explored other models of practice which may improve their effectiveness further. The Chair of the Governing Body has a clear strategy to ensure strong and secure leadership in the long term during the absence of the substantive headteacher.

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 provided important guidance and support to the school to help drive improvements, especially in the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improving writing across the school. In addition, support for the moderation of pupils' assessments have helped to improve the reliability of current achievement data. Governors have received valuable advice and guidance about the management of human resources but have not benefited from specialist consultancy which the local authority has available. The acting headteacher has forged important links with a local good school, from which he has been seconded, to support the school's improvement planning.

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

Yours sincerely

Her Majesty's Inspector