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Ms Alison Dowding
Headteacher
Harold Wood Primary School
Recreation Avenue
Harold Wood
Romford
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Dear Ms Dowding

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harold Wood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 June 2014 with Kevin Flanagan HMI, 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 us 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 April 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:

- establish a partnership with a successful local school to work with leaders on their plans to increase the pace of school improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the deputy headteacher, representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and a group of middle leaders to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also conducted a tour of the school with senior leaders.

Context

Since the last inspection, two teachers have resigned and you have appointed replacements for them. New literacy, mathematics and Early Years Foundation Stage leaders have been appointed. You have completed a more general restructuring of staff for the coming academic year. The current lead for literacy is stepping down from her role at the end of the current school year. The new mathematics leader is already in post. Building work to accommodate the growing numbers of pupils in the school is continuing.

Main findings

You have reconsidered plans so they are now focused on the areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. You have made sure staff and governors know about these changes. Your plans identify how you intend to improve teaching with precise timescales for actions. They explain the impact you expect to see on teaching but do not yet identify how well and how quickly teaching is expected to improve pupils' achievement. Leaders are still too vague about the impact of their work on securing better outcomes for pupils.

You have recruited a new leader for mathematics who is already in post and beginning to influence improvements in this subject. The leader for literacy is stepping down from her role in September and, although you have made a new appointment, there has been little impact on achievement in literacy since inspection.

Pupils are now clearer about what they need to do next to improve their work. This is because targets on tables or in books help them understand what they need to learn next. They are using these to improve their work or move on more quickly to harder work in some classes. Working walls are dominated by guidance written by teachers. They do not include enough examples of pupils' own work. Displays more generally lack a wide enough range of pupils' own writing.

In some classes teachers are asking questions and setting challenges which allow pupils to try harder work as soon as they are ready for it. Pupils say they enjoy being challenged like this and learning becomes more animated where this is happening. Pupils understand the marking policy. Work is marked regularly but many comments teachers write in books do not provide helpful advice to pupils.

Your own data and predictions indicate that pupil achievement is not yet improving rapidly enough. There are still variations in progress seen in pupils' work across the school. Pupils are achieving more when you identify improvements with precision, such as in the development of phonics skills in Key Stage 1. Your own evidence suggests that some pupils, such as those entitled to additional funding (pupil premium) are making better progress. However, gaps between their achievements and those of other pupils still remain.

Middle Leaders are working together to decide how to develop their leadership skills further. Now that these leaders have access to data more readily it is helping them identify areas for improvement and their own training needs more accurately. Senior leaders will need to direct training for middle leaders skilfully so it matches the priorities suggested by achievement evidence.

Governors say that a more open culture is emerging which helps them communicate with leaders more effectively. They have reviewed their own skills with the help of the local authority and feel confident in their ability to ask the right questions of leaders. However, they do not yet see achievement information regularly enough to enable them to hold these leaders fully to account.

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 knows the school well and understands its current strengths and weaknesses. Its involvement in the school's monthly progress review meetings has provided good challenge and support. Local authority officers have supported governors in their self-evaluation and provided professional development for some school leaders.

The pace of school improvement needs to quicken. You should establish a partnership with a successful local school who can work with you to help decide how this can be done. The local authority and governors have both voiced support for this.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector