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Mr Peter Brandreth
William Byrd Primary School
Victoria Lane
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Dear Mr Brandreth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Byrd Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- refine the school action plan so that it includes quantifiable targets for the achievement of different pupil groups
- improve the quality of marking in pupils' books for all subjects
- resolve the current tension between leaders, governors and the local authority so that the school can improve quickly and focus upon securing good progress and good teaching for all pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and your two deputy headteachers, a group of middle leaders, the school improvement partner, members of the governing

body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan and records about the monitoring of teaching were evaluated. I scrutinised minutes of governing body meetings, data about pupils' achievement, reports by the local authority and documents about the monitoring of teaching. We visited lessons together to watch teaching, look at pupils' books and see pupils' behaviour in lessons.

Context

Since the first monitoring inspection two new deputy headteachers have joined the school. There are further staffing changes planned for September 2014. The Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in September 2013.

Main findings

The progress of the school has stalled since the first monitoring visit. Inconsistencies in planning, teaching and marking remain. This means that not all pupils are making good progress. There is tension between leaders, governors and the local authority which is hampering the progress of the school.

You and your senior leaders have reviewed the school development plan to ensure it includes appropriate reference to the priorities from the inspection in November 2012. The plan identifies which leaders have responsibility for monitoring the success of the actions in the plan and there are timescales for improvement. Despite this the success criteria is not specific enough in stating exact targets for the rates of progress of different groups of pupils, especially to close the gaps in the progress of pupils benefitting from pupil premium funding. There are insufficient regular checkpoints to help senior, middle leaders and governors judge how well different groups of pupils are achieving.

Systems to monitor teaching and the impact of marking on pupils' progress are becoming more refined. You and your middle leaders are starting to review achievement data alongside scrutiny of pupils' work and observations of teaching. Some of the forms used for observing teaching explain how teaching in lessons and over time develop pupils' subject knowledge and what they know and can do, but others do not. Very few observations make specific reference to the achievement of particular groups of pupils such as those with special educational needs and those who benefit from the pupil premium funding. This is a missed opportunity to focus sharply on the achievement of pupils who are lagging behind and not making the progress they are capable of making from their starting points. The lack of challenge for the more able pupils and in some classes the lack of different tasks and resources matched to pupils' ability, is limiting their progress. Leaders have generous view of the quality of teaching at the school. There is insufficient good teaching and still too much that requires improvement.

You have set higher expectations of staff in your marking policy and leaders undertake more regular scrutiny of pupils' books. However, the reviews of pupils' books have not identified that some books, notably topic books and work in science, religious studies and humanities, have not been marked for some time. Throughout the school the quality of marking is inconsistent and the depth and engagement of pupils with teachers' feedback is very mixed. In some English books, for example in Year 6, pupils take great pride in presenting their work neatly and their responses to marking show they are really tackling how to improve their work. Lower down the school some books are scrappy with too many poorly completed worksheets and limited opportunity for pupils to develop their writing skills. The pace of work, level of challenge and expectations in classes we visited are not high enough.

Behaviour in most classes is attentive and pupils are keen to learn. Most know their targets for literacy and numeracy and are eager to talk about their learning. Others say work is too easy and they get behind because the teachers do not see that they are struggling to keep up. A small minority of pupils skim through work and do not complete work in lessons or homework. Marking is cursory and lacking in challenge.

The systems to gather and analyse data about pupils' achievement are improving. The deputy headteachers are starting to train middle leaders to understand how well your pupils are doing compared with expectations nationally but this has not moved forward quickly enough since the first monitoring visit. As a result, not all leaders have the skills to check how quickly gaps in pupils' achievement are closing and link this to the robust monitoring of the school development plan. Their work to develop teaching is not securing improvement and consistently good practice quickly enough. Middle leaders are reviewing planning in different subjects and how to embed better literacy and numeracy teaching but the impact is variable. Developments in the planning and teaching of reading are led well and in some year groups progress in reading is improving. The teaching and progress of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains a strength of the school's work.

Governors have responded well to the external review of governance. The new Chair of the Governing Body has a good overview of strengths and areas needing further development. Governors are benefitting from training to help them understand achievement data but not all are confident or up to speed with analysing data to ask challenging questions of leaders about pupils' progress. Minutes show that governors are steadily demanding more from senior leaders about the quality of teaching in the school but until recently governors were too accepting of information from the headteacher about the progress of the school. Governors commissioned an external consultant to undertake a review of teaching and the findings from the review raise questions about the consistency of practice across the school. As the level of challenge from governors to leaders is increasing, this is revealing that the school is not securing rapid nor secure enough progress.

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 school contracts an external consultant who visits regularly to review the school's progress and provide support for leaders. The reports from the consultant are identifying areas of concern that have yet to be tackled. During my visit, we discussed the current tension between governors, leaders and the local authority. The local authority has an accurate view of the school's progress and governors are working well with a National Leader of Governance to develop their practice. The local authority brokered additional support from a National Leader of Education and senior leaders visited a school locally to undertake visits to classes with their senior leaders. The impact of this work has been too slow and this second monitoring visit raises concern about the progress of the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall
Her Majesty's Inspector