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Mr Jim Lidgley
Headteacher
Whitby, Airy Hill Community Primary School
Waterstead Lane
Whitby
North Yorkshire
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Dear Mr Lidgley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whitby, Airy Hill Community Primary School, North Yorkshire

Following my visit to your school on 14 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors, and the local authority education development adviser. I evaluated a range of documents including the school and local authority improvement plans, information on the pupils' current achievements and attendance, minutes of meetings and the school's recently introduced policies on teaching and learning, and assessment, marking and feedback. In addition, I undertook a tour of the school with the headteacher and had a brief conversation with staff and met with a small group of parents at the start of the school day.

Context

One member of staff has been absent for an extended period owing to ill health. The school's governing body has been reconstituted as a result of a skills audit and external review completed in the spring term. Two new teachers have been appointed and will join the school in September 2014.

Main findings

School leaders have a sound understanding of what needs to be done to bring about swift improvement. A number of new approaches have been introduced to improve the quality of teaching and marking and raise achievement. The focus on developing early mathematics, pupils' writing skills and improving the teaching of phonics is evident throughout the school. Scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' feedback confirms that the standard of pupils' work and teachers' marking is improving. Teachers are using the 'star and respond' system effectively and providing guidance that helps pupils know how to improve their work. 'Response time' at the start of the school day is being used increasingly well to provide routine opportunities for pupils to act on the feedback they receive. During a brief visit to each class during this monitoring inspection, pupils settled quickly, used their 'response time' productively and demonstrated positive attitudes to their learning.

There are improvements in the range and quality of monitoring activities undertaken by senior and middle leaders and governors. Recently completed external moderation confirms the accuracy of the school's assessments. As a result staff are confident that standards are rising throughout the school and pupils are making better progress than in 2013. Effective systems and strategies are being put in place to support and sustain improvement over the longer term. The school improvement plans are suitable for purpose and follow the areas for further improvement identified during the inspection in January 2014. Parents with whom I spoke during this visit expressed confidence in the school and the improvements being made.

Tracking and assessment systems are currently being overhauled. Clearer lines of accountability between leaders and teaching staff are being established, for example, through the recently implemented pupil progress meetings. A range of staff development and training includes opportunities to share the good practice within the school and increased links established with local partner schools. The curriculum and the teaching commitments of leaders have been reviewed and new arrangements are in place ready for implementation at the start of the new school year.

Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and a clear intent to make a difference. They acted swiftly to complete a skills audit and external review and to reconstitute the governing body in line with the recommendations received. Governors, especially, the Chair of the Governing Body have accessed a wide range of training. As a result, the governing body is more sharply focused, better-informed and supports and challenges school leaders effectively.

Ofsted may carry further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The advice and support being provided by the local authority has been welcomed. It is proving effective in helping school leaders and staff to identify and tackle priorities and develop strategies for the school's next steps. Specific activities undertaken in the school to date include support for the development of strategies to improve: teaching and learning, phonics, writing, mathematics and individual provision maps for pupils with special educational needs, joint lesson observations and learning walks, a whole school review and moderation of teacher assessments.

The headteacher and staff are drawing well on the support provided through the Whitby Town School Partnership and a more recent partnership established with Stakesby Primary School that is currently being funded by the local authority.

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

Yours sincerely

Wendy Ripley

Her Majesty's Inspector