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Nick Heald
Headteacher
Holdbrook Primary School
Longcroft Drive
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Dear Mr Heald

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holdbrook Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 July 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 February 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 that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they present their work.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, two senior leaders, two members of the governing body and spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also evaluated the school action plans and the school's assessment information. You accompanied me during visits to all classes in the school where we observed teaching and looked at pupils' work.

Context

Since the inspection one teacher has retired with effect from the end of the summer term. You are currently in the process of appointing a replacement teacher. You

have appointed a new senior leader from within the existing staff to promote the development of mathematics. You are currently recruiting a deputy head teacher.

Main findings

Your action plan prioritises the right areas for improvement. It places pupil achievement at the centre of the school's work and this is having a positive impact across the school.

Teaching is improving in most classrooms and standards are rising as a result. This is most apparent in reading and mathematics, where attainment in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 is in line with age-related expectations. This is also the case for writing in Year 5 but in other year groups standards in this subject are below the expected level. In all year groups pupils are making at least expected progress and in some areas, such as writing in Year 5, many are making more than expected progress. The rapid progress is clear in pupils' work.

Although teaching has improved in most classes, some still requires improvement. In these classes, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. This means that teachers frequently ask pupils who are of very different abilities to do exactly the same work. A scrutiny of pupils' work showed that, for example, a pupil who is learning the basics of writing was doing the same writing activity as another who is a competent writer. The work was too hard for one pupil and too easy for the other one, limiting the progress that both could make.

The quality of marking also varies. You have introduced new approaches to marking since the inspection and some teachers have implemented these changes very quickly. In these classes, pupils are responding to teachers' marking and thinking about what it means and how they can improve. This is in contrast with other marking in the school which is brief and gives pupils little information about what they need to do in order to improve.

Standards of presentation were criticised at the last but improvements can now be seen in most classes. In some classes pupils take great care with their work and their handwriting is good. This is also beginning to happen in the Early Years Foundation Stage where pupils are learning to write neatly and legibly. In a small number of classes, pupils' handwriting has not improved and work is presented very poorly.

You are expanding the school's leadership team and have made good use of local authority support in this area. A newly appointed leader of mathematics has quickly set up an action plan and is working with an advisor to improve the quality of teaching in this subject. This includes full staff training to raise awareness of the different mathematical resources that are available for staff to use. A link with another school with a track record of driving up standards in mathematics has also been established. In addition, a business manager started work at the school

recently to enable you to focus your time on improving the quality of teaching and raise achievement.

Your action plan is clear about what you want to achieve but does not set out a time-frame clearly enough. As such, staff cannot be fully clear about exactly when things need to have been achieved. Governors are monitoring the school's progress effectively. More regular visits to school are helping them to become much more familiar with the way that the school operates.

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 is providing an appropriate level of support. This has included reviews of progress since the inspection, leadership support and subject support from specialist advisors. The local authority is also providing support with the recruitment of a deputy head teacher.

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

Yours sincerely

Christopher Moodie
Her Majesty's Inspector