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16 October 2014

Mr C Clark
Headteacher
Portfield Primary Academy
St James Road
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 7HA

Dear Mr Clark

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Portfield Primary Academy

Following my visit to your academy on 16 October 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 academy since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the academy was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 academy should take further action to:

- adapt the school development plan to focus more closely on the areas for improvement identified in the section 5 report
- check teaching and pupils' work more systematically
- develop middle leaders' skills so they can help improve teaching.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and your deputy headteacher, middle leaders and governors to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also talked to the regional director from The Kemnal Academy Trust (TKAT). I visited classes with you, scrutinised work in pupils' books and evaluated the academy improvement plan.

Context

The acting headteacher has returned to her role as deputy headteacher and the interim executive headteacher has returned to her own school but has taken on new roles of governor for the school and regional director for TKAT. You joined the school as headteacher in September. A new team leader has joined the school, with responsibility for the teaching and learning in Key Stage 1.

Main findings

Since you joined the school in September, you have begun to tackle the areas for improvement with urgency and focus. The actions you have taken are relevant and appropriate, and it is clear that progress is being made. However, you have not amended the action plan to include the areas for improvement so it is not clear to senior leaders, governors or staff what you plan to do and how you will know if it has been effective. This should be completed by the end of November.

You have gained a thorough knowledge of the school and were able to summarise accurately the strengths and development points of each teacher before we visited their class. You and other senior leaders are doing too much work developing individual teachers because middle leaders do not yet have the skills they need. They are checking books and supporting with planning, but they are not yet being developed or held to account for their roles as team leaders.

In pupils' books we saw that there is much greater consistency in the marking and feedback, with most pupils responding to the comments and follow-on questions. Where this is working well, the pupils are learning more. Examples of this were when pupils edited their sentences to use more interesting vocabulary, and solved slightly harder problems than they had worked on in their mathematics lessons.

Your restructuring of English lessons is helping to improve reading and writing. Teachers now teach reading and phonics (how letters link to sounds) for a short session each day, and writing is taught separately. You have carried out relevant staff training to improve some elements of teaching writing, with weekly sessions on different aspects such as planning, handwriting and grammar. The increased focus on writing is resulting in pupils in some classes writing more and making more progress, but this is not yet happening in all classes.

Standards of presentation and handwriting are still not high enough. Although improvements have been made, teachers do not recognise that there is more to do. In the handwriting books we saw, the pupils' writing was deteriorating rather than getting better because there was no feedback from the teacher.

Governors have responded quickly to improve their effectiveness by changing the way they record questions and outcomes of meetings. Actions are now recorded explicitly and a date is listed for completion; these are sensibly followed up at the next meeting.

External support

Although TKAT has provided support, it has not been focused well enough on meeting the academy's needs. This means that you were not aware of the need to amend the improvement plan prior to the first monitoring visit, and the meetings you have had have not had a clear enough focus on improving the school. However, it is positive that, from now on, the planned weekly support will be provided by the regional director. It is helpful that she knows the school well because she was previously the executive headteacher, so she can support you to continue the positive work started by her and the acting headteacher last term.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of TKAT and the Academies Advisors Unit at the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Louise Adams
Seconded Inspector