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16 October 2014

Mrs Sharon Wyatt
Headteacher
Horn's Mill Primary School
Denbigh Close
Helsby
Frodsham
Cheshire
WA6 0ED

Dear Mrs Wyatt

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Horn's Mill Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2013. 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 you and senior and other leaders in charge of subjects and aspects of the school's work. I also met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the governing body and two other governors. Additionally I held a discussion with a representative of the local authority (LA). I scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and made brief visits to three classrooms to check the quality of teaching and learning. I considered a range of documentation related to the school's work, for example, records of monitoring teaching and learning, systems for performance management and information about pupils' achievement. I checked the single central record and found it to meet requirements.

Context

Since my last visit you have taken up your role of the new headteacher and a Year 1 teacher and a teaching assistant for Reception have been appointed.

Main findings

It is very clear that since my last visit, all members of the school community have made great strides in improving the quality of education that you provide for your pupils. Your success is evident in the provisional information held by the school concerning the 2014 outcomes of national tests. Overall, the rate of pupils' progress across the school has improved significantly when compared to the 2013 results. Pupils' performance in phonics is much stronger and there have been gains in most measures in Early Years and at Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2 in particular, there is evidence of dramatically improved attainment and progress in all measures, including the proportion of pupils who make more than expected progress. The school recognises that there is more work to be done to ensure that pupils' progress is as strong at Key Stage 1 as at Key Stage 2 and for some of the most able pupils.

These strong improvements point to the continuing increase in the proportions of good and better teaching across the school. This was evident in pupils' learning in classes I visited and in the pupils' work that I scrutinised. Teaching is better because staff have had high-quality training in the use of assessment information to identify and act rapidly to support any pupils who risk falling behind. An especially strong feature of the teaching is consistently high-quality marking across the school. In addition staff have had various opportunities to see and share existing good practice within Horn's Mill Primary School and in good and outstanding neighbouring schools. This has added to teachers' enthusiasm for improving their own practice further.

More challenging pupil progress meetings now reinforce the responsibilities all teachers have for pupils' achievement. You have linked these responsibilities in a highly transparent and objective way to arrangements for managing the performance of teaching staff. This ensures that salary progression is very tightly linked to raising pupils' achievement.

As a new headteacher, you have worked tirelessly over summer to improve the learning environment for pupils and, ably assisted by your chair of governors, you have revised, in a few short weeks, all key policies. You have quickly made a very astute appraisal of staff and the capacity of senior and other leaders to lead aspects of the school's work. You have not hesitated to make changes to staffing to ensure that all, including teaching assistants, are deployed where they can be most effective. This has established across the school a strongly purposeful ethos of teamwork and continuous improvement, shared by all, including pupils.

This ethos is reflected in pupils' behaviour, including their attitudes to learning, which I found very positive during my visit. In conversation pupils are forthcoming, articulate and confident. They discuss with maturity their views about their learning.

Pupils say that they are happy and feel safe in school and that teachers make learning fun. They particularly appreciate the greater sense of freedom of movement as well as security that you have created around the school. Pupils can recall no recent incidents of bullying and say that all pupils are welcomed in the school, whatever their differences. Pupils are very positive about changes made since your appointment and particularly enjoy your involvement alongside them in sports activities. Your records show that the great majority of parents are also very supportive of the changes made, and where they are not, you listen carefully to their concerns.

All of these tighter systems have significantly improved the confidence of staff and a real energy now pervades the school. Governors have played a strong role in improving the school so rapidly. They have been very proactive in seeking external support and have determinedly supported and challenged the school over the past year. You have already forged a very productive professional relationship with them, to the benefit of the school. All these factors, together with the fact that you have tackled successfully all the recommendations from the last inspection report, demonstrate the school's strong capacity for further improvement.

External support

The LA has given strong support to the school through its journey towards improvement. They have given significant time for LA advisers to support the school, including a senior adviser, subject advisers in English and mathematics and have organised support from national leaders of education and governance. Nevertheless, your previous experience has given you a clear understanding of what makes a school good or outstanding. While you make very effective use of LA support, you are developing your own independent links to widen the range of support and challenge for the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester and as below.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority