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17 December 2014

Peter Brandreth
Headteacher
William Byrd School
Victoria Lane
Hayes
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Dear Mr Brandreth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Byrd School

Following my visit to your school on 17 December 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 July 2014. 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:

- identify and secure effective external support for school leadership
- urgently review plans for improvement so they clearly identify urgent timescales and hold everyone equally to account
- ensure that advice given to teachers after checking on their work concentrates on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the two deputy headteachers to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Meetings were also held with a group of middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives of the

local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A tour of the school was conducted, looking at pupils' work and visiting classrooms. The school's own records of the monitoring of teaching and a sample of minutes from recent governors' meetings were scrutinised.

Context

At the time of this monitoring visit the headteacher was absent from work. The inspector spoke to the two deputy headteachers who are jointly leading the school in his absence. Since the last inspection a new literacy leader has been appointed who will begin work in January 2015. A teacher is leaving in December and another teacher is returning from maternity leave at the same time. A teaching assistant has been appointed to support disadvantaged pupils in the early years and Key Stage 1. You have also appointed a part-time teacher to support disadvantaged pupils in Year 4.

Main findings

Your plans for improvement do not explain how you intend to address the areas for improvement clearly enough. Timescales for expecting improvements to take effect are too generous. Plans do not hold everyone to account consistently. The measures you intend to use to evaluate the impact of actions on achievement are too vague. There is a significant variation between your written self-evaluation and the evidence leaders have of the school's current effectiveness. For example, senior leaders know that the progress of pupils in the nursery is disappointing. Your written self-evaluation does not reflect this. Governors have decided that your plans are not fit for purpose and have asked for them to be urgently revised. The inspector agrees with this decision.

You have worked with the help of external support to check on the quality of teaching in a regular and systematic way since the last inspection. Middle leaders say that senior leaders are providing effective training to help them contribute to this work. They are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching as a result. You use an appropriate range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching over time. However, the advice you provide to teachers is too vague. It does not make it sufficiently clear how they can improve their work in relation to whole school areas for improvement. The absence of clarity in your plans for improvement further hinders the impact of your monitoring work. As a result the quality of teaching is not improving quickly or consistently enough.

Teachers' marking is improving but there is still too much variation. Too many comments give general praise without being specific about what is praiseworthy. Pupils are still asked to do too much work which is already within their capability. This is particularly evident in mathematics books seen. Learning intentions clearly recorded in books are often challenging and suitable. However, pupils do not often

get written feedback which relates to these intentions. More work is evident in books and standards of presentation are improving. More evidence of extended writing is emerging in other curriculum subjects but this varies even between classes in the same year group. This means pupils are not enjoying equal opportunities to make progress. You have introduced a colour-coded system of marking. This is helpful in promoting consistency but is reducing written dialogue in some books.

You are clear about the decline in standards of achievement seen in 2014. You have introduced a pupil tracking system which is helping leaders identify progress more effectively. This has only been in place since September and the evidence it provides is still limited as a result. Your own analysis of this indicates that most pupils have made progress in the current school term. You also agree that the rate of progress is not yet quick enough to make up for previous underachievement.

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

An independent consultant has provided helpful support as you have developed approaches to checking the quality of teaching. A collaboration with a local effective school is helping you to moderate the assessments you make of pupil achievement. The local authority has been limited in opportunity to engage with the school and therefore to offer you support. They have recently issued governors with a warning notice because of the low standards of achievement currently evident. The local authority says it is able to help you secure external support on request.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector