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24 April 2015

Sandra Rex
Holyhead Primary School
Holyhead Road
Wednesbury
WS10 7PZ

Dear Mrs Rex

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holyhead Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 April 2015, 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 December 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 improvement plans include a clear timeline so that you and your governors can measure progress against actions precisely and accurately
- ensure that there is a clear distinction between actions to be taken and success criteria and that, wherever possible, the measurement of success is linked to improved outcomes for pupils
- clarify the stages of monitoring and review and who is responsible for each, clearly identifying the role of governors in this process.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, pupils, members of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A learning walk also took place, with brief visits made to a range of lessons, including brief discussions with pupils about their work. Writing portfolios were scrutinised and the school action plan was evaluated.

Context

There have been no major changes to staffing or the situation of the school since the last inspection.

Main findings

You are taking effective action to move the school forward. You, your leaders, and governors have responded positively to the Ofsted inspection and the areas for improvement identified, many of which had been recognised by the school.

The school's action plan identifies appropriate actions to address the required improvement. The actions identified are carefully focused on the key priorities linked to clear targets. However, these now need to be refined so that, for each action, improvement can be measured at key points over time. This will enable you and governors to quickly identify where progress may have stalled or where targets may be achieved more quickly. Equally, clarification of the monitoring and review cycle will ensure that governors are more fully involved in the process. We agreed that some success criteria need to be more closely linked to improved outcomes to pupils.

You recognise that a major priority for the school is to improve writing across all year groups. A number of key actions have been taken and there is evidence that these are having an impact as rates of progress in most year groups are beginning to improve. The Year 6 writing portfolios seen, demonstrate the school's efforts to increase both the range and extent of writing opportunities provided for pupils and how this is being supported by more effective marking that ensures pupils know what to do to improve. However, you are equally aware that a lot more remains to be done to ensure that all pupils reach at least national standards in this area. We agreed that current rates of progress, although improving, are not yet rapid enough in some year groups to address previous under-achievement. Plans are in place to further sharpen the focus on writing, including through investment in a professional development project for teachers to improve subject knowledge and build on-going capacity in the school.

You are rigorously monitoring the progress of all pupils, including that of vulnerable groups. We discussed the way in which some of this was presented and agreed that in one instance the format used was unhelpful to the school as it presented a more

negative picture than is actually the case. Nonetheless, the school's own progress data suggests that, overall, achievement will rise this year for Year 6 to at least the national average, including in writing. It is predicted that over 64% of children in the Early Years will achieve a good level of development in 2015, reflecting the improvements made to Early Years provision since the last inspection. You also expect that 76% of Year 1 pupils will achieve at least the national average in phonics and 90% of Year 2 pupils. This will represent a significant improvement since 2014.

At the time of the last inspection it was noted that disadvantaged pupils were making similar progress to that of others in the school. You have continued the focus on this group and your monitoring suggests that this has been very successful. Consequently, in some year groups disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than other pupils, thus closing the gap further.

You have taken action to ensure that quality assurance systems, including the monitoring of teaching are more robust. More frequent moderation, both internally and with external partners, and more formalised pupil progress meetings, are supporting greater rigour and more accurate information. A calendar of quality assurance activities is published so that every teacher knows exactly when and how they will be held to account for the progress of their pupils.

Since the last inspection, you have supported middle leaders to develop their skills so that they are now much more fully involved in monitoring the quality of both teaching and achievement within their areas of responsibility. This is beginning to have the desired impact as issues are being identified much more rapidly, so that additional support and intervention can be put in place at an early stage. For instance following the success of the 'click' groups in mathematics, the leader for literacy has introduced 'gaps' groups. These enable targeted and appropriately challenging activities to improve grammar, punctuation and spelling, based on up to date and accurate assessment information.

You have introduced annual impact reports, which require middle leaders to report on their work over an academic year with a clear focus on impact this has had on improving outcomes for pupils. Although at an early stage, this is proving successful in ensuring that leaders at all levels understand the priorities for improvement and their contribution to achieving the desired outcomes.

You are also overseeing a revised curriculum model for foundation subjects with the aim of improving the range of opportunities for application of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. A good example of the school's vision for literacy in all subjects was seen in a Year 6 music lesson, where pupils were encouraged to apply their literacy skills whilst composing lyrics to go with the tune they were practising.

Governors know the school very well. They are active, committed and prepared to challenge appropriately as well as to provide targeted support. They have developed an impressive approach to succession planning to ensure that the governing body

remains 'fresh' and dynamic. They are proactive in requesting and sourcing additional information and as a result are increasingly able to make independent assessments of the information they receive from leaders which, in turn, is increasing their ability to take a strategic role in driving improvement alongside the headteacher.

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

External support

The local authority is supporting the school appropriately. Although the current adviser allocated to the school has only been with the school a very short time, she has quickly identified key strengths to build on and is very clear about how and when further support is required.

You are also drawing appropriately on support from the cooperative trust to which the school belongs, as well as from the local teaching alliance.

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

Yours sincerely

Mel Ford
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation