

15 May 2015

Mrs Jane Tomlinson
Headteacher
Underwood West Primary School
Newcastle Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 3LF

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Underwood West Primary School, Cheshire East

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 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 March 2015. 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:

- review action plans so that they provide a clear, measurable and long term route map towards improvement that allows leaders, including governors to check on progress towards securing rapid improvement
- ensure that the school's marking and feedback policy is applied consistently by all teachers.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, mathematics and English subject leaders, a small group of pupils from Key Stage 2 and members of the governing body. I also held a telephone meeting with a representative of the local authority. Documents were scrutinised including: the school development plan, subject action plans and class action plans, records of your checks on teaching and records of a visit to the school by a consultant. I also visited each classroom with you to speak to pupils, look at their books and observe their learning.

Context

Since the last inspection the governing body has appointed a new Chair.

Main findings

You and other senior leaders in the school accept the findings of the recent inspection and share a common desire to take the necessary action to move the school forward. You have amended existing year group action plans so that they focus on improving achievement, particularly for middle ability and the most able pupils. Subject leaders have also amended mathematics and English improvement plans so that they clearly outline a route map for the coming term. However, some planned actions, including those on the overarching improvement plan, do not effectively point the way for staff and governors. This is because the criteria to measure success are too vague and plans are too short term.

You and other members of the senior leadership team have undertaken a range of activities to check on the quality of teaching since the most recent inspection. This has allowed you to identify where strengths and weaknesses lie. Consequently, the assistant headteacher has tailored support and training on areas such as guided reading and the teaching of phonics; this is beginning to impact positively on pupils' progress. Nonetheless, you are aware that these improvements are at a very early stage and that further action is required to secure sustained improvements.

The mathematics subject leadership team has wasted no time in moving forward and has raised its game to address the issues identified at the most recent inspection. This was exemplified in the days following the inspection by the team researching what the best quality mathematics teaching looks like and amending its improvement plan accordingly. Evidence seen in pupils' books during my learning walk shows that problem solving is now beginning to be given a higher priority across the school. Subject leaders have delivered three staff meetings to help ensure that staff develop their skills and confidence in this area. You have also begun to develop links with a local teaching school alliance and a mathematics specialist was delivering further training about mathematical reasoning and fluency on the day of my visit. Furthermore, you have invested in an online mathematical resource that pupils are able to access from home. Pupils say that this new fun element to their learning encourages them to do their homework and consequently further develop their skills.

Teachers in Years 5 and 6 have trialled a new mathematics teaching strategy that allows greater time for pupils to develop reasoning skills by using specific vocabulary, challenges and key questions. Your own impact assessment has shown that this has accelerated pupils' progress, developed teachers' confidence and increased pupils' engagement in lessons. You plan to train all teachers in using this approach for full implementation across the school in September.

English subject leaders are also playing their role. An initiative to develop speaking skills as part of improving writing has been introduced into the Early Years Foundation Stage and is embedded throughout the rest of the school. Your own analysis of data shows that there are very early signs that this is helping to improve the achievement of the most able pupils. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that a greater proportion of pupils are on track to reach the higher levels in writing.

The quality of marking and feedback to pupils remains inconsistent and does not always adhere to the schools' own policy. However, there are signs in some classes that pupils are

responding to teachers' comments with their 'green pens' as they are now being given time to do this at the start of lessons.

Senior leaders and governors monitor attendance and punctuality closely. A 'late gate' operates each day and staff work closely with families and external agencies, such as the educational welfare officer. The impact of these actions is not yet being fully seen with attendance rates varying week by week.

In their own words governors 'are not here to be cheerleaders' they say that they have a new sense of drive and purpose, particularly since the appointment of the new Chair. They are well informed and know well the school's strengths and areas of weakness. They have acted decisively to review performance management targets of senior staff, linked to the areas of improvement from the recent inspection. Two governors have been appointed to champion the cause of middle ability and more able pupils. You have also provided all governors with job descriptions for the roles they undertake. As a consequence, they feel that their role is now more clearly defined and that they are better prepared to check on the progress you are making to improve the school.

External support

You are currently establishing links with a local teaching school alliance and have applied for funding to support this process. The local authority has confidence in your ability to move the school forward quickly and consequently has adopted a light touch approach to support.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell

Her Majesty's Inspector