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25 June 2015

Mrs Louisa Aldridge
Headteacher
Astmoor Primary School
Kingshead Close
Castlefields
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 2JE

Dear Mrs Aldridge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Astmoor Primary School, Halton

Following my visit to your school on 24 June 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 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.

Evidence

I held a number of meetings, including those with you, the deputy headteacher and the assistant headteacher; 11 pupils; four members of the governing body, including the Chair; and a representative of the local authority. The school's improvement plan was evaluated.

I toured the school with you, visiting each class and looking at displays of pupils' work and a very small sample of pupils' books. I also looked at a range of documentation, including that related to monitoring undertaken by leaders since the inspection of March 2015. I read the records of recent governors' meetings. I also took into account the 17 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, submitted in the 365 days up to 24 June 2015.

Context

Since the inspection of March 2015 the deputy headteacher has returned to school on a part-time basis following a period of maternity leave. In addition, following a reconstitution of the governing body, three members have resigned.

Main findings

Although deeply disappointed at the outcome of the March 2015 inspection, leaders and governors have dusted themselves down and have begun to tackle the recommendations raised with determination. Leaders and governors, as demonstrated by the clear plans for improvement in place, know what to do to improve and how to achieve the goals set. The sense of trust the governors have in you and the school's senior leaders is strong.

Leaders and governors are now more able to pinpoint where evidence to demonstrate improvements may be found. For example, samples of pupils' work marked by teachers show clearly that the school's policy for marking and feedback is being increasingly consistently applied. Consequently, pupils are responding more often to comments made and are making improvements in their work. Because such samples have been made available to members of the governors' monitoring committee, governors have a clear view of this aspect of the school's work. Leaders' records of teaching gained through observations of lessons identify well what adults do in lessons to interest pupils and meet their needs. These records, however, do not routinely make clear the difference teaching has made to the learning of pupils. That said, the records give clear feedback to teachers about strengths and areas for improvement.

Leaders and governors have a clear view of how much more effectively teachers are using assessment information on a day-to-day basis. Regular meetings between teachers and leaders, coupled with the class action plans, target well individual pupils or groups of pupils. The result is that the school expects improved outcomes for pupils in the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 assessments in summer 2015. Work in pupils' books and on displays around the school support this confidence.

The way teachers teach pupils to write interesting sentences and use their imagination well is paying dividends. One Year 1 pupil, for example, when writing in her own words an information book about bees, added that bees are special because when they find the pollen in flowers, '...they wiggle their bottoms...'

Pupils' work in mathematics shows they are increasingly adept at solving problems. Pupils in the Year 5 and 6 class, for example, were using percentages to provide and compare details of discounts to be made available to would-be advertisers wishing to promote themselves on different radio stations. Plans are in place to further pupils' skills in problem-solving, including by making links with other schools to share and learn from good practice.

Pupils who discussed the school with me hold it in high regard. They were polite and engaging in discussions and keen to show off their work in class. They were particularly keen to talk about ways in which subjects link together and how lessons and homework are made interesting. Following the study of Halton Castle, for example, impressive models of castles constructed by pupils with the help of their families are on display around the school. Other examples of family-based homework tasks include in the Year 4 and 5 class realistic models of Venus fly-traps.

Leaders are proud of the work the school undertakes to promote learning in topics and themes that makes use of skills pupils have developed in different subjects, skills in literacy for example. Recognising the challenge planning for learning in mathematics sometimes presents when working in this way, more thought is to be given to this from September 2015.

Members of the governing body with whom I spoke share the same commitment and passion to improve that is shown by leaders. Having undertaken a thorough audit of their skills to carry out their functions and reconstituted, members are looking forward to the independent review of their work in the autumn term of 2015.

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 knows this school well as demonstrated by the clear records of visits undertaken by advisers. It has provided strong levels of support and challenge, including the provision of additional funding to allow teachers to observe teaching and learning in other schools. It, too, has faith that leaders and governors are taking effective action.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- The Chair of the Governing Body
- Halton local authority