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22 January 2016

Mr C Stanley
Headteacher
Murdishaw West Community Primary School
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Dear Mr Stanley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Murdishaw West Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Wednesday 13 January 2016, 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 May 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and your deputy headteacher. Meetings were also held with three middle leaders, three members of the governing body including the Chair, six pupils and a representative of the local authority. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. Together with your deputy headteacher, we toured the school and scrutinised a range of pupils' work. I also looked at a range of documentation, including that focusing on the progress of pupils, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and leaders' checking of teaching and learning quality. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

The former assistant headteacher has been appointed as deputy headteacher following the retirement of the previous postholder. New staff to the school include a newly qualified teacher and a teaching assistant.

Main findings

The judgement of requires improvement came as no surprise to the school. It is clear to me that you, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school.

Swift action has been taken to bring about improvement since the May 2015 inspection. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that teachers are better focused in identifying errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Consequently, pupils are improving in the use of these features of writing, although accuracy remains inconsistent. Overall, pupils are consistently making at least expected progress in their learning. This is a better picture than that found in the past. We agreed that more robust evidence to show that pupils are making better than expected progress needs to be gathered. We also agreed that it was important to ensure the wide range of information held about the progress pupils are making remains manageable and is used consistently well to enable teachers to challenge pupils to do better or support those in need of extra help.

The accurate overview gained by your leaders, including your middle leaders, has been enhanced greatly by the time you have made for all to check the quality of teaching and learning through, for example, scrutinies of pupils' work and lesson observations. We agreed that leaders' lesson observation records could be sharpened by focusing more directly on the learning of pupils. Nevertheless, all records show accurately that teachers are implementing your agreed policy for marking and feedback.

Middle leaders are growing in confidence because of the faith you have shown in them to carry out their duties diligently. It is also growing because of the coaching, mentoring, challenge and support of the deputy headteacher, the local authority and a local consortium of schools. Consequently, middle leaders have a good insight into the strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility. The early years leader, for example, can pinpoint good improvements in the quality of teaching which led to a substantial rise in the proportion of children gaining a good level of development in 2015 compared to 2014. Furthermore, both the Key Stage 2 and the mathematics leaders recognise that, while teaching and learning in mathematics is improving, there are historical gaps in pupils' understanding of key concepts which makes problem solving and mastery difficult. As a result of knowing this, important interventions are in place to fill these gaps.

Pupils spoken with articulated well a good understanding of what is special about Britain. They were less clear, however, about the rich variety of cultures that can be found in Britain today.

Governors have a keen understanding of the school. They support you and your staff well. They ask challenging questions, demanding, for example, evidence to show why one way of working in mathematics is more beneficial than another.

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 continues to provide good support and challenge to leaders. Representatives pinpoint strengths and areas to develop well. Good work continues to be undertaken with early years staff, so much so that the school's leader of early years has been identified as having the skills required to mentor other leaders and staff in this phase.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Halton local authority. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector