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14 September 2015

Tim Browse
Headteacher
Hillcrest Primary School
Cemetery Road
Bristol
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Dear Mr Browse

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hillcrest Primary School

Following my visit to your school on Monday 14 September 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 January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection that took place in February 2013 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. The school should take further action to:

- Ensure all governors are able to confidently explain the effectiveness of the support and challenge they provide to the school and difference it is making to the achievement of all pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with the senior leadership team, subject leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two officers from the local authority. The school development plan was evaluated. I accompanied you on a walk around the classrooms to see the pupils at work. I also looked at a range of school

documentation. This included the improvement plan for all subjects and examples of themes of work used across year groups.

Context

Since the inspection two teachers and one teaching assistant have left. They have been replaced by new staff. At the start of this academic year a number of internal staff changes were made with teachers moving to teach different year groups. One new governor has been recruited.

Main findings

The disappointment felt by all of the school community following the inspection has not detracted you from your shared focus on driving school improvement. Your school development plan accurately identifies the key development areas and clearly explains how these will be improved. Indicators for success are timely with roles and responsibilities clearly noted. The clarity and rigour of the development plan highlight the effective way your senior staff and subject leaders are working as key drivers of school improvement.

By introducing a clearer approach to checking the quality of teaching, there is now a greater focus on identifying specific areas that require development for each teacher. This is then used to develop bespoke training packages for each individual. Workshops and sessions modelled by senior staff to show good practice are organised to support teachers' development. The impact of this training and the subsequent impact on the quality of teaching are then checked by senior leaders to ensure that pupil outcomes have improved as a consequence. The success of this new, tighter approach to monitoring and evaluation is reflected in the better pupil outcomes across the school. Pupils are eager learners and confidently approach new learning. They listen carefully to their teachers and work well with each other.

Teachers are becoming more familiar with the system used to track pupil progress and are taking greater responsibility for recording the information required. This has helped them to develop a better understanding of the specific needs of different groups of pupils. By carrying out more specific observations of classroom teaching, including looking at work books, senior leaders are ensuring that all groups of pupils are getting the support they require to make better progress. The school has carried out its own audit of the way in which it spends additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils. The audit confirms that the funding is carefully planned, reviewed and checked for effectiveness. This is because teachers are now setting their pupils much higher goals to achieve and they expect them to do their very best. Pupils are encouraged to aim for the 'Hillcrest Standard' which is the highest accolade that they can achieve for the quality of their work. There are agreed expectations of the way in which pupils are required to set out their English and mathematics tasks. This is ensuring that there is a shared understanding of quality between teachers and pupils.

You are continuing to develop the way in which all subjects are taught across the school. The well-planned themes of work ensure that there is a balanced approach to all aspects of science, including biology, chemistry and physics and the humanities. Learning is made meaningful through studies of the local area. By dedicating full day sessions, six times a year, to the teaching of religious education, the pupils get a depth and breadth to their knowledge and understanding of different religions. Opportunities to apply their writing and mathematical skills are now woven into all subject themes. This is helping the pupils apply the skills they are learning across the whole curriculum. Careful attention is given to ensure that they are given opportunities to develop their ability to write for different purposes across all subject areas. For example, with clear safeguarding systems in place, pupils 'blog' their work and receive worldwide replies. This has helped engage those pupils who are reluctant writers to understand the importance of writing. It has also helped all pupils to have a greater knowledge of the wider world around them and the important role information technology plays in communication across the globe.

A number of minor additions have increased the effectiveness of the provision for the early years. The development of all groups of children is supported by the wide and varied range of resources which are easily accessible to the youngsters. This enables, even the youngest children, to explore all the areas of learning. Children's progress is carefully checked using an electronic-recording system which captures their learning in school and helps teachers plan their next steps. Children's own interests are frequently used to launch new learning sessions. For example, those who have previously lived in other countries confidently share with their new friends the language and customs they are familiar with.

Governors have increased their involvement in the life of the school and have a better understanding of their need to challenge senior leaders. They have carried out their own audit of roles and responsibilities which is used to plan appropriate training for all governors. Governors have developed a greater involvement in the school's self-evaluation of its effectiveness. They have done this by reorganising the structure of the governing body, aligning their improvement plan to sit alongside the school's plan and have developed closer links with subject leaders. Governors monitor and report the impact of one-to-one tuition which has been provided for disadvantaged pupils. However, they are not all able to speak confidently about how the support and challenge they provide the senior team leads to school improvement and effective pupil outcomes. This means that they cannot demonstrate that the actions they have taken have made an impact on pupil outcomes.

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

You have sensibly maintained your links with a small group of strong schools who work closely together providing each other with support and challenge. Shortly after the inspection, the local authority funded an external adviser to carry out an audit of teaching, the findings of which supported the school's self-evaluation. The local authority has provided high quality specialist help to support teachers improve the way that they teach different subjects. This has given them greater confidence in developing the breadth and depth of teaching skills across the school. The local authority has also been proactive in maintaining the self-esteem of the staff and reaffirming their confidence as an effective school which serves the local community well.

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

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone

Her Majesty's Inspector