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Mr Hugh Vivian
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Dear Mr Vivian

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hollickwood Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 29 April 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 September 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 last section 5 inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders and the chair of the governing body. I also held a discussion with a senior officer from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I looked at a range of documentation, including the school's improvement plans, information about pupils' achievement and documentation relating to safeguarding. I visited classes with you to look at pupils' work and observe them during lessons.

Context

Since the last inspection the deputy headteacher has left the school. This has allowed you to reorganise the senior leadership team. The Year 5 class is being taught by a teacher on a temporary contract.

Main findings

Your plans for improvement are sharply focused on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. They include suitably ambitious measures of success, which are checked in a timely manner. Senior leaders have maintained the positive culture for learning which is a well-established feature of the school. At the same time, they have stepped up the challenge and expectations of teachers' work. The assistant head teacher has played a significant role in developing the skills of the wider leadership team. These leaders have become more knowledgeable and confident in their leadership skills. You are holding teachers more closely to account when monitoring the quality of their work. However, the guidance you provide to help teachers improve further needs to be more sharply focused on the weaknesses identified at the last inspection.

Your checks on the progress pupils are making have become more reliable and accurate. You have wisely ensured that these assessments are checked both within school and in collaboration with teachers from other schools. This work is helping accelerate pupils' progress. However, more emphasis could be placed on the evidence provided by work in pupils' books when deciding how well they are doing.

Pupils in key stage 1 are making better progress in reading and mathematics. This is because teachers are picking up weaknesses in their learning earlier. You have engaged parents more effectively in continuing pupils' learning at home. Homework provided now covers a wider range of subjects. Training for teachers and support staff has been effective in improving their skills in teaching these subjects.

The teaching of writing has also improved. Pupils make better progress because teachers provide more effective guidance and use clearer language to explain how pupils can improve their work. Teachers have higher expectations of the quality of vocabulary which pupils are expected to include in their writing. The range of literature teachers use to exemplify good writing has improved. Leaders pick up on any inconsistencies in the quality of teaching more rapidly and precisely.

The external review of the use of pupil premium funding has been used well to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Most are making better progress than other pupils in the school. This is enabling gaps to close. Leaders have used the review to ensure that a specific focus on disadvantaged pupils is maintained.

Your attempts to improve pupils' attendance and reduce persistent absence have led to some success. Persistent absence is declining and overall attendance has risen. However, you know more work needs to be done to achieve the ambitious targets you have set in your plans. Many pupils do attend the sessions you provide for them to complete additional work before and after the school day. This demonstrates the positive impact you are having on improving the attitudes of some pupils and parents to learning and attendance.

Governors have continued to offer strong challenge and support when questioning you about the impact of your plans for improvement. They have ensured that objectives to evaluate teachers' performance are aligned with the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Their strategic acumen is of crucial value in ensuring that leaders sustain the pace of improvement towards becoming a good school.

External support

The local authority has increased its involvement with the school since the last full inspection, and now visits very regularly. This has ensured that the authority has a detailed, accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This helps the authority to provide valuable support to school leaders, particularly in the pursuit of external verification of the success of your improvement plans.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of children's services for Barnet and the regional schools commissioner. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Wright
Her Majesty's Inspector