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Ms Louise Regan
Headteacher
Hillocks Primary and Nursery School
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Nottinghamshire
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Dear Ms Regan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Hillocks Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 11 October 2016 with Michael Wilson, Ofsted Inspector, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 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 June 2015, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, a group of eight pupils, and members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring inspection. I evaluated your plans for improvement. Inspectors visited seven lessons following scrutiny of documentation relating to your checks on the quality of teaching. I reviewed your most recent data relating to pupils' outcomes. I considered the quality of pupils' learning in English and mathematics. I checked the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils.

Context

Since the previous monitoring inspection in January 2016, there have been few changes to staffing. There is currently one teacher on a temporary contract. There have been no changes to membership of the governing body.

Main findings

You have been proactive in seeking to address the issues identified at my last monitoring visit in January, but the school's development work has not been consistently effective across all of the areas for improvement. The emerging improvements that can be seen in relation to the leadership and management of the school have not yet secured the necessary improvements in the rate of pupils' progress in English and mathematics, especially in key stage 1. The school needs to address this urgently in order to ensure that improvements in leadership have greater impact on improving pupils' outcomes.

You and the governors acknowledge from the school's own tracking data that the proportion of pupils at Hillocks who achieved the expected and higher standards in reading and writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2, in July 2016, was too low.

You have made strides to ensure that the school is more outward looking and that expectations of all staff are higher. The school's recent partnership with Edgewood Primary School has been particularly helpful in developing a new system for identifying targets for pupils' learning. While this system has only recently been introduced it is too early to assess its effectiveness. Teachers consider that it is helping them to focus more sharply on what pupils need to learn next so that they can meet their learning targets.

The school's work in monitoring the quality of teaching has improved since the last monitoring visit, but it is still not as effective as it needs to be. You now have a clearer schedule for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, and the senior leaders now have dedicated time to enable them to model best practice and observe teaching across the school. However, the quality of the feedback given to staff about the quality of their teaching is not always clear enough. As a result, it is not obvious what the teachers need to improve, or the support identified to help them achieve the changes required. This lack of sharpness is a significant factor in slowing the rate of improvement of teaching, learning and assessment across the school.

You have ensured the school's strengths in providing effective support for vulnerable pupils and promoting pupils' good behaviour, and positive attitudes to their learning have been maintained. This aspect of the school's work continues to be recognised and valued highly by the wide range of agencies with which the school works.

The teachers and teaching assistants across the school use a wide range of resources to capture the pupils' interest in their learning and to support their speaking and listening skills. However, the quality of teaching is too inconsistent, particularly in key stage 1, and especially for the most able pupils who are not effectively challenged enough of the time. The leader for key stage 1 models strong teaching but there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching environments and in the effectiveness of teachers' strategies to assess pupils' understanding. The school's policy for marking and assessment is not followed consistently by staff. As a result, mistakes in pupils' learning are sometimes not corrected and misconceptions in pupils' understanding are not rectified.

The quality of governance is improving. The chair of the governing body is now well established in her role and has an increasingly accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The governors have actively sought training to develop their skills, and this is enabling them to have a far greater understanding of the school's tracking information for pupils' academic performance. The chair of the governing body now ensures that updates and reports regarding pupils' progress and teachers' performance are received by all governors in advance of their meetings. Together, these individual changes are enabling governors to ask appropriate questions about the information you have given them. Consequently, they are beginning to be able to hold you and other senior leaders more effectively to account.

You have refined the school improvement plan, which now includes more detail about how you intend to improve teaching and raise standards. Your plan is now much clearer in terms of which members of staff are responsible for leading which actions. Nevertheless, your plan does not set out tight enough timescales for the completion of specific activities and targets so that governors can keep a close eye on the rate of implementation of key actions. The plan also fails to present the school's information about the pupils' outcomes at Hilllocks, within the context of achievements nationally. As a result, it is difficult for the governors to readily see how well pupils are doing compared with others nationally, and the expectations of staff are still not consistently high enough.

You have made the necessary changes to the school's website since the previous monitoring visit and it is now compliant.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority adviser has provided a range of support for the school. He has helped senior leaders to develop their skills in producing a more detailed plan for improvement and has brokered support from another school within the local authority. While this support is helping to deepen leaders' understanding of strategies and systems to help to improve the quality of teaching and learning, it has not yet had sufficient impact on accelerating pupils' outcomes and raising standards of attainment.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

Clare Cossor
Her Majesty's Inspector