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Mrs Lynn Pilling
Howitt Primary Community School
Holmes Street
Heanor
Derbyshire
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Dear Mrs Pilling

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howitt Primary Community School

Following my visit to your school on 23 February 2017, 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 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in September 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

You and your senior leaders and governors are 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 you and other senior leaders, with representatives of the governing body, and with subject leaders, and a telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I toured the school, making visits to all classes in the main school and in Reception Year. I met with a group of pupils and scrutinised a sample of the pupils' work. I observed the work of one of the school's subject teams.

Main findings

The external review of the pupil premium, recommended at the section 5 inspection, was carried out promptly and has been completed. As a result, the school has changed its strategy for using the pupil premium, so that it now identifies more clearly than before the barriers to learning experienced by the pupils. The resources have been allocated to activities that are aimed at helping the pupils to overcome the barriers.

The school improvement plan has been revised. It includes explicitly a priority to increase the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. It does not, however, set out clearly the measures by which senior leaders and the governing body will know whether these pupils' progress has been improved enough, or not.

The school has taken practical and effective steps to increase the frequency, amount and type of reading by the most able disadvantaged pupils. You have purchased a significant number of new books to enable this to happen. The pupils with whom I spoke described enthusiastically how more careful use of the reading logs and 'book bingo' have encouraged them to read more often and more widely.

Senior leaders have taken a range of actions to improve the subject knowledge of the staff. The curriculum has been changed, allowing better use of staff knowledge, for example in modern foreign languages. The subject leaders' role has been rejuvenated and the subject leaders are actively identifying good practice, both within the school and beyond, and spreading it among the staff. Staff development teams, such as the humanities team, are helping to develop the staff's expertise and leading to appropriate changes in classroom practice.

The staff's expectations of what the pupils can achieve are increasing. The teachers plan more carefully now to set work with different levels of demand, according to the pupils' needs. Generally, the pupils find the level of challenge to be reasonable and manageable. The school has not ensured, however, that the level of demand for the most able pupils is as high as it could be in all subjects and year groups.

The feedback and guidance given to the pupils are now in line with the school's policy more consistently than at the time of the inspection last September. Often, the teachers take the opportunity to get the pupils to do something a little more difficult, if the pupils have completed some work successfully. Typically, this leads to improvements in the pupils' work.

The precision with and degree to which this is done varies between subjects and year groups and, occasionally, errors made by the pupils in their responses are not corrected. Also, the teachers' expectations of the pupils' presentation of their work are not consistently high in all subjects.

The re-energised subject leaders have been the most notable improvement since the inspection in September. They are now playing a major part in leading developments. They demonstrate clarity about their responsibilities, confidence in fulfilling them, and initiative and determination in carrying them out. Their work in monitoring the quality and impact of teaching and in feeding back to the staff is laying a secure foundation for the school's improvement. They have been supported well by senior leaders and by the governing body.

External support

The local authority has financed important refurbishments of the school's accommodation. The refurbishments have provided a much improved environment for the pupils. The local authority adviser's support for the school was changed just before this inspection, due to unforeseeable circumstances. The local authority has been careful to provide the school with access to appropriate skills and experience, but the precise focus and nature of support for the school are still being planned.

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

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss

Her Majesty's Inspector