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Mr Jim Harrold
Huntingtree Primary School
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Dear Mr Harrold

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Huntingtree Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 December 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 June 2016. 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 recent section 5 inspection in order for the school to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the teaching of writing is matched well to the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able pupils, and includes opportunities to write across the curriculum and at length
- ensure that teachers support pupils to improve their spelling and handwriting skills more rapidly
- ensure that development plans include specific, measurable success criteria that can be easily monitored by governors and leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, members of the wider leadership team, pupils and members of the governing body. The school improvement plan was evaluated, as was the school's self-evaluation document. I visited classes in all year groups across key stages 1 and 2, reviewed pupils' work and scrutinised a range of documents, including the outcomes of monitoring activities, governors' minutes and local authority visit reports.

Context

Since the inspection in June 2016, there has been significant staffing upheaval. The headteacher, deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and ten other teachers have left the school. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2016 and a deputy headteacher in January 2017. Three new parent governors have joined the governing body in addition to a new vice-chair of governors.

Main findings

Immediately following your appointment, you quickly began a root and branch review of all aspects of the school's performance. Within a short time, you uncovered a significant number of other pressing issues that needed resolving. These were in addition to those that had been identified at the last inspection. Due to this, there was a period of 'firefighting' which caused a delay in addressing some of the concerns identified at the previous inspection. Significant changes in staffing also initially hampered the pace of improvement. Staffing is now relatively stable, which is helping to ensure a greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning.

You have established a clear set of improvement priorities to ensure that the school moves forward. You have formed a new senior leadership team that takes collective responsibility for bringing about improvements. The team is cohesive, committed and determined to raise standards. The new English and mathematics leaders have settled into their roles well. They are enthusiastic and are already bringing about positive changes in their subject areas. Other teachers have the opportunity to observe and learn from them. Working alongside the deputy headteacher, you have reacted energetically to the challenges that the school presents. You and other leaders have worked hard to create a culture where pupils have a better understanding of the purpose of their learning and are more self-motivated.

Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses in relation to teaching and learning. They have created action plans that are focused on tackling the right issues. However, occasionally, leaders' plans, and how they will measure success, are not specific enough. For example, although leaders are clear about which aspects of writing need improving, these are not stated explicitly in the action plan.

This means that leaders and governors are less effective in monitoring how successful the school is in fully implementing its actions and securing improvement.

There is still inconsistency in the quality of teaching, although it is improving. Leaders' checks on teaching are proportionate to need. Those teachers requiring the most support receive more frequent lesson observations from leaders. You have developed a robust approach to any teaching that falls short of the mark. Immediate support is put in place, including coaching for teachers, with a clear expectancy that teaching will improve. Leaders make sure that any recommended actions are implemented promptly to ensure that teachers improve their practice and pupils achieve better learning outcomes. This strategy is working.

Teaching is characterised by carefully structured lessons which, in most cases, are effective in addressing gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers typically provide prompt feedback to pupils about their work and progress, which enables them to move on quickly. Sometimes, when there is insufficient challenge, pupils complete work quickly and have to wait before they can move on. This slows their learning. This is notably the case in key stage 1, where teaching is weaker. Support in classrooms for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is improving. These pupils are usually set tasks which are well matched to their needs, enabling them to make increasingly better progress.

In 2017, pupils' rates of progress by the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics improved compared to the previous year, although remained below national figures. Progress in writing fell to well below the national average. Pupils' current writing is now improving, although there is still more work to do. Teachers' focus on sentence-level work is impacting positively on pupils' grammar and punctuation skills. However, pupils' spelling is not developing quickly enough. There are too many spelling mistakes in pupils' work. Similarly, pupils' handwriting is too variable and not consistently well formed.

You recognise that key stage 1 results in writing were particularly disappointing in 2017, with broadly only one in five Year 2 pupils attaining the expected standard. This has become a sharp focus for improvement and you have already taken positive steps to address this area of weakness.

In some classes, there are still not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length so they can apply their writing skills. A few pupils, usually the most able, spend time practising skills which they have already securely acquired. As a result, these pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Leaders also recognise that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write for different purposes across a range of subjects.

You have worked hard to ensure that pupils' assessment is accurate. New systems to track pupils' achievements have been implemented. Leaders use assessment information to pinpoint specifically what teachers need to focus on in their teaching,

then monitor to ensure that it happens in practice. You closely track pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Assessment information is used diagnostically to inform teachers' planning and address pupils' gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

An external pupil premium review was completed in November 2016 with a further follow-up visit in July 2017. You have responded to the recommendations made, which is leading to better support for disadvantaged pupils. There has been a fundamental shift in the way pupil premium funding is used, with a focus on improving reading. The school's assessment information shows that the difference in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and others is beginning to diminish. The pupil premium leader has begun to monitor more closely the impact of additional funding on pupils' achievement.

Governors know the school well and have a greater understanding about the school's needs. They have received useful training to help them carry out their roles effectively. They hold leaders to account for the school's performance and carry out their own visits to check on the school's work. Governors join with leaders in monitoring activities to get a deeper knowledge of how well pupils are achieving. They ask searching questions to ensure that they have a clear understanding about how well the school is performing. Governors now monitor more frequently and with a tighter focus linked to the school development plan.

External support

The local authority has carried out two monitoring visits since the school was judged to require improvement. There has been no further support from the local authority since this time. Leaders have sourced additional leadership support through the Halesowen cluster of schools. This has been beneficial to leaders in helping them to widen and develop their leadership skills.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill
Her Majesty's Inspector