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Charlotte Angeli
Holdbrook Primary School and Nursery
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Dear Miss Angeli

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

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the monitoring 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 monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and has taken place because the school has received three successive judgements of requires improvement at its previous section 5 inspections.

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

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that progress is strong across all subjects and year groups
- make sure that teachers use their assessment of pupils' work to inform what they teach next
- raise teachers' expectations of what pupils, especially the most able pupils, can and should achieve
- make sure that children in the early years are involved in meaningful activities which build well on adults' assessment of their current knowledge and skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you and other leaders, the headteacher of the education improvement partner (EIP) and four governors. I spoke with the school improvement partner from the 'Herts for Learning' education service and met with parents, carers and pupils. I reviewed a range of documentation, including your evaluation of the school, the school's records of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, minutes of meetings of the governing body and the school's improvement plans.

Together, we visited all classes and reviewed the work of pupils in their books.

Context

The school was last inspected in February 2018. You have very recently been appointed as headteacher and restructured the senior leadership team. From November 2018 to the time of your appointment the school was led by the deputy headteacher with support from Dewhurst St Mary C of E Primary School, known as the EIP. Arrangements for support from the EIP remain in place and are due to continue for the next 12 months.

Main findings

You have very quickly grasped the key strengths and weaknesses of provision and already know the school well. Your assessment of the quality of education is astute and accurate. You are ably supported by a close team formed of the headteacher of the EIP and the deputy headteacher. Together, they effected some improvement in provision prior to your arrival.

As leaders, you have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and are developing plans to achieve this. However, it is too early to see sufficient change as a result of your new work and evolving plans. Over time, leaders have not improved provision enough for the school to have made effective progress. Not enough has been done to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in the previous inspection.

The previous inspection report identified the need to improve progress in all year groups. While there is strong progress in some areas, such as in Year 1 writing, this is not the case across the school. In key stage 1, attainment was below the national average in 2018. It remains low, because teaching does not secure good progress in English or mathematics in Year 2. Progress across key stage 2 is variable and the stronger progress pupils make here depends too much on the quality of teaching in Year 6.

Teachers do not use assessment information as well as they should to develop pupils' progress. For example, the quality of mathematics provision has been

improved because of the introduction of a curriculum which sequences work logically and covers key topics in sufficient depth. However, some teachers rely too much on this. They do not consider what pupils have learned before moving on to the next stage of the curriculum. This means that new knowledge is not embedded, and pupils' misconceptions persist.

Work is still not challenging enough for the most able pupils. Teachers do not typically provide work which will enable these pupils to reach the higher levels of attainment. Errors which should be corrected for those working at a more advanced level are not picked up as often as they should be and the work teachers set does not reflect high expectations of what these pupils can achieve.

Provision in the early years continues to be less effective than it should be. You have commissioned an external review of this aspect of the school and made changes to the leadership of the early years. This is because you recognise children are not learning as well as they should. Too much of children's time is spent undertaking activities which are not purposeful. Adults do not use their assessments of children's progress well to help children move on. Time is wasted and children's outcomes at the end of the early years are lower than they should be because they are not taught well.

You have made some improvements to leadership and management in your short time as headteacher. You already know the strengths and weaknesses in teaching well and have a clear idea of what needs to be improved. You and the team around you have also improved the management systems so that documentation is better organised. There is now more to do to ensure that this early work impacts positively on the quality of education that pupils receive.

Governors are reinvigorated and ambitious. They welcome the guidance they have received in recent months from the headteacher of the EIP. They feel they now have better access to information and are more welcome in the school. However, governors' access to the information they need is very recent. They have not had the clear evidence they need to provide incisive challenge to leaders. Improvements in provision have been slow to come about. Over time, governors have not secured enough progress in the quality of education at the school.

External support

The external support provided by the EIP has had some impact. Because of the work of the EIP, appraisal systems are now in place to hold teachers to account. Systems for using information about the progress of pupils now ensure that teachers see evidence of, and discuss, the progress pupils are making. The sharing of good practice from the EIP has improved teaching in one year group. The governing body is better informed as a result of the training provided by the headteacher of the EIP.

The work of the EIP has been effective in preparing the school to properly begin addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection report.

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

Yours sincerely

Andrew Hemmings
Her Majesty's Inspector