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23 April 2015

Mrs Pam Purdon
Howitt Primary Community School
Holmes Street
Heanor
DE75 7FS

Dear Mrs Purdon

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Howitt Primary Community School

Following my visit to your school on 22 April 2015, 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 December 2014. 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.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated your plans for improvement. I visited classes and observed three lessons with you. I spoke with a group of pupils from Key Stage 2 and looked at work in pupils' books in both key stages.

Context

Since the last inspection one member of staff, with responsibility for literacy, has been absent and two members of the governing body have resigned.

Main findings

You have been relentless in addressing the issues identified at the last inspection and have the highest possible expectations of yourself, and the highest of aspirations for your staff and pupils. The morale of staff is good because they now share your vision for the school and are committed to addressing the legacy of underachievement.

The school improvement plan sets out clear targets to tackle the key areas needed. Tasks are assigned to different teams and staff. However, individuals are not named and, therefore, it is not always sufficiently clear who will carry out or monitor which action.

All staff now consistently demonstrate high expectations for pupils. A new format for termly pupil progress meetings is ensuring that all teachers understand their responsibilities in assessing and planning effectively for every pupil in their class. As a result, they have a more accurate view of the progress and attainment of all pupils, including those who are more able, and those with special educational needs. Work in lessons is more challenging and better matched to the needs of pupils.

Subject and senior leaders have ensured that there is a much more systematic approach to the teaching of reading and mathematics. They monitor the quality of teaching and classroom support rigorously. They ensure that all staff have regular feedback about areas of strength and those where improvement is needed. Targets for teachers and teaching assistants are closely matched to pupils' outcomes and, as a result, there is evidence of improvement in pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

You have made it very clear to all teachers about what is 'non-negotiable' in terms of the organisation and quality of learning resources. As a result, classrooms are inviting and interesting places to learn, and work is presented to pupils with greater care and imagination. Pupils in a Year 3 class were proud to talk about their work on the Romans. They were particularly enjoying the additional challenge of solving some problems which were written in Roman numerals. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils are now given more opportunities to apply their mathematical learning in other subjects but this is not yet consistent in all classes.

Attitudes to learning, from the vast majority of pupils are consistently good. Pupils are able to describe the school rules and have clear understanding of what sanctions are put in place if 'you don't complete your work or try your best'. A lower-ability pupil in Key Stage 2 was proud to talk about how he had been awarded the special class trophy for his mathematics.

Your uncompromising drive to improve the outcomes for children is increasingly understood and shared by governors. They have accessed local authority training and, as a result, are much confident and skilled in holding leaders to account

because they 'know what to look for'. Their visits to school now have a sharp focus on teaching and learning and are always linked to an area of improvement. Their actions are helping to raise standards throughout the school.

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

External support

The local authority has continued to provide good support to the school. Local authority consultants for English and mathematics have worked alongside senior leaders, class teachers and teaching assistants. This has contributed to the improved quality of teaching. Governors have accessed local authority training and, as a result, are much more confident and skilled in holding leaders to account and driving the rise in standards across the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Clare Cossor
Her Majesty's Inspector