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16 October 2013

Gary Murrell
Headteacher
The Priors School
School Lane
Priors Marston
CV47 7RR

Dear Mr Murrell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Priors School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 2013. 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. The school should take further action to:

- use all opportunities to check the quality of teaching and to give teachers clear guidance on how to improve
- ensure areas identified for teachers to improve are precise and that senior leaders frequently check that they have been acted upon.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, three members of the governing body and the improvement officer identified by Warwickshire County Council to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school development plan was evaluated. Other documents were examined: up-to-date information about pupils' achievement; the school's policies for marking pupils' work and for managing the performance of teachers and records of observations of lessons. A tour was made of

the school site to look at the renewed accommodation and short visits were made to lessons to talk to pupils and look at their books.

Context

There have been substantial changes to the school since the section 5 inspection in June. A new school building has been completed and handed over to the school at the end of September. The transfer of pupils to this accommodation was completed this week. The chair of governors and one other governor resigned in September. Two new governors have been appointed. An additional teaching assistant took up her post at the beginning of September. The headteacher from a local federation of schools is supporting you. One of these schools is an outstanding school and one is similar in size to The Prior's School.

Main findings

You and the governing body show a clear commitment to addressing the issues identified at the section 5 inspection. Alongside managing the completion of and move into the new school building, you have put into place systems aimed at raising standards and driving improvement. Pupils now have individual targets for English and mathematics which show them how to progress to higher levels in their learning. Governors have sought and acted upon external support to help them carry out their responsibilities more effectively, such as the use of data to hold the school more stringently to account for the achievement of different groups of pupils. These systems are still very new and so have not had time to show impact on pupils' achievement.

The school development plan includes appropriate actions for improving the quality of teaching, raising standards in writing and increasing the effectiveness of senior leaders. It sets out a realistic timeframe for when improvements are expected. Responsibilities and accountabilities, including those for governors are clear. Some targets for pupils' achievement are not ambitious enough or do not sufficiently take into account what pupils can already do. The plan would benefit from these targets being more closely linked to speeding up the progress of specific pupils. Opportunities for the headteacher and governors to evaluate the impact of the plan are identified. These are not frequent enough to ensure improvement will be rapid and sustained.

You, your teachers and teaching assistants regularly discuss ways to better meet the need of all pupils including the more able, and to raise standards in writing. Teachers' performance targets reflect these priorities. Some pupils' books show they do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length, so their skills remain under-developed. The books of some more able pupils indicate there is still not enough challenge in lessons. Training is planned to address these issues. Visits to other schools are planned for teachers to observe good and outstanding practice and for leaders to develop improved approaches to judging the quality of teaching over

time. Your teaching commitment takes up a large proportion of your time which limits the opportunities you have to check the quality of teaching, so feedback to teachers on what is going well or what needs to improve is not frequent enough to raise pupils' achievement quickly.

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

Warwickshire local authority responded swiftly to the inspection by providing guidance for improvement planning and by identifying the headteacher of a local federation of schools to act as improvement officer to the school. You have welcomed this support and have acted upon advice. Plans are in place to tailor this support to the specific needs of your school. The governing body has commissioned an external consultant to provide support and coaching and to advise on your performance management.

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

Yours sincerely

Sandra Hayes
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] – for academies