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8 November 2013

Mrs S Mills
Headteacher
Frodsham Weaver Vale Primary School
Ship Street
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Warrington
Cheshire
WA6 7PZ

Dear Mrs Mills

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Frodsham Weaver Vale Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester

Following my visit to your school on 7 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 September 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- audit the quality of teaching to gain an honest and accurate view of the teaching that occurs in all classrooms on a day-to-day basis
- identify the strengths and weaknesses in teaching to set precise targets and ensure teachers receive support and training which is matched to their individual needs
- strengthen leadership capacity by reviewing roles and responsibilities
- ensure the governing body is involved in activities which help them to gather their own evidence to check how well the school is performing.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the deputy headteacher, seven members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and

school data, including the unvalidated 2013 results were scrutinised. The school's monitoring records were also considered. We visited each classroom to observe pupils at work. I also met with a small group of pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

Context

Since the September inspection, a new Chair of Governors has been appointed. The Year 6 teacher is due to leave school at the end of the autumn term.

Main findings

You, the staff and members of the governing body are taking the findings from the recent Ofsted inspection seriously. Everyone has been very busy since the inspection to tackle the school's shortcomings. Nonetheless, the actions you are taking to bring about improvement are not making a big enough difference. This is because they are not getting to the heart of the matter, which is improving teaching. Not enough attention has been given to gaining an honest and realistic view of the quality of teaching that takes place in classrooms each and every day. Your evidence shows you have checked teaching since the inspection. However, your findings have not been closely matched to information on pupils' progress to make sure the positive picture you see in classes is happening all of the time. As a result, you, your senior leaders and the governing body have too positive a view of teaching across the school. Your own data does not confirm your findings on teaching. Too few pupils make better than expected progress and some pupils did not make enough gains in their learning to cover lost ground in the past. The school's view that teaching is good is the key barrier to stopping you from moving forward with greater urgency.

The feedback provided to teachers on the quality of their performance is imprecise. Too much emphasis is given to organisational or resource issues rather than identifying the key factors which stop all pupils making better progress. The steps each teacher needs to take to improve their skills are not crystal clear. As a result, training and support are not closely matched to teachers' individual needs.

There is a lot of work to do to make sure pupils make stronger progress and begin to reach the levels expected for their age. Your action plan shows you know what steps you need to take, but in reality, too much responsibility for bringing about improvement is resting on your shoulders. Despite your passion and determination to succeed you cannot do this alone. Leadership capacity must be extended if you are going to make a difference to teaching and pupils' achievement and ensure the school is judged good at the next inspection.

Despite some of your actions not bearing fruit, there is evidence of success since the recent inspection. Essential systems are firmly in place which means you can keep a check on the school's progress. You have been quick to secure whole-school training from local authority officers and independent consultants to tackle weaknesses in English and mathematics. This is leading to a greater urgency in promoting pupils' basic skills. Changes to the school day mean learning time is being exploited more fully than in the past. Classrooms have been transformed into vibrant learning areas

which support pupils' learning and promote their self-esteem. There is a greater quantity of work in pupils' books, which are well presented and carefully marked by class teachers. Pupils say teaching is improving because teachers are better at explaining new ideas. They appreciate the helpful prompts around the classroom which they say help them when they are stuck for ideas.

The governing body have acted very quickly to improve their own effectiveness. They have audited their skills and used this information to restructure how they work. They have identified their own training needs and they have been very proactive in drawing up a list of actions they need to take to improve further. Governors have a better understanding of school data but are not challenging the school about the mismatch between this information and updates on the quality of teaching. They are in the early stages of gathering their own evidence about the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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

You are using the support available to the school well. Effective support from an external consultant is helping you to develop your skills in checking the quality of teaching. This support has also been instrumental in raising your expectations of the progress pupils in Key Stage 1 need to make from their different starting points. You are very open to advice and guidance; this is a real strength. As a result, you have already established a link with a local outstanding primary school. You are using this expertise to help you bring about change. Strong support from the local authority means you have received timely help to deal with staffing issues. Teachers and the subject leader for mathematics have already benefitted from the work of a local authority officer. Nonetheless, you would welcome a greater level of support and challenge from the local authority to make sure the school is on track for a successful inspection outcome in the future.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector