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12 December 2013

Mr Ian Hardman
Headteacher
Plantation Primary School
Hollies Road
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Liverpool
Merseyside
L26 0TH

Dear Mr Hardman

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Plantation Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 11 December 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 October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle areas requiring improvement identified at the section 5 inspection, and should take further action as below.

- Senior leaders to ensure recent changes in classrooms become firmly rooted in normal practice, so that pupils' progress in every year group improves.
- Support middle leaders to become more familiar with whole school data and targets.
- The headteacher to summarise evidence on performance management so that governors can more easily take an overview for decisions about pay progression.
- Teachers to give boys more opportunity to write at length using computers in class.

Evidence

During the visit, I met you, teachers leading English and mathematics, representatives of the governing body and of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school post-inspection action plan was evaluated and information about performance management considered. On an extended learning walk, I visited three classes. I looked at a sample of written work by higher achieving pupils and met with a group of children in Key Stage 2 to talk about their work.

Context

On the governing body, six members are new this year, including the Chair and governors linked to literacy and governor development. Each of the fifteen governors has a link role.

Main findings

The headteacher and governors have worked quickly and well to bring about change. The headteacher has put in place a precise, well-founded action plan, starting with clear analysis of children's achievements, for different groups, including more able pupils in line with issues raised in the inspection report. Analysis of present performance is used to set targets and translated into changes in teaching and help for particular groups of pupils, such as for some boys in reading. In this way, the plan is grounded in what pupils need.

Governors have had a big influence on making sure that evidence, measures of success and dates are listed clearly in the plan, so they can monitor progress regularly. They question more in meetings, rather than taking things on trust. Governors have searched out training keenly, especially on using data. They visit school regularly, talk with pupils and staff, and look at books. They have a sharp understanding of how actions affect learning, giving examples in extended writing, consistent marking, and higher level work in mathematics.

Pupils also mentioned these same three changes – in mathematics, marking and writing. Older students I talked with really appreciate feedback and marking that advises them how to do better. Most said that they tried to act on the advice. In the best lessons, teachers expect pupils to think for themselves and apply new skills to solve real life problems. There is little time spent waiting for others to finish. Subject leaders are enthusiastic about the changes and could improve further by increasing their understanding and use of data that relates to the overall performance of the school.

I looked at thirty books, some as a separate sample and some in classrooms with pupils. The best work books were being used by pupils as a resource, such as in science where two pupils referred back to experiments done earlier in the term to explain how you work scientifically. For younger pupils, I saw hard work to choose topics to motivate boys to read and write. However, there is a balance needed to avoid too many worksheets and one word responses. There are too few opportunities to use ICT as a routine part of classwork so that boys can feel proud of the way their work looks.

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

The local authority has delegated much classroom support to clusters of primary schools. There are many good and some outstanding schools locally. Plantation School has used the local cluster as the main source of support for developments in learning and teaching. For example, training for writing and mathematics which has had good impact was organised through the cluster. The local authority has given appropriate support, through a school adviser on forming and monitoring the action plan. The headteacher has also networked with local outstanding schools, less formally but very effectively.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Knowsley, as below.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority