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24 January 2014

Ms Sue Marsh
High Down Junior School
Down Road
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Dear Ms Marsh

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to High Down Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 24 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 November 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:

- strengthen targets within the school development plan so that they relate to pupils making at least good progress.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. There were also a number of short visits to lessons. The school development plan was evaluated.

Context

There have been significant staffing changes at the school since the recent inspection. An acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher took up post from 1 January 2014. A new Chair of the Governing Body was also appointed in January 2014.

Main findings

You have made a strong start in addressing the school's areas for improvement, identified at your recent inspection. The main focus is, rightly, on developing the quality of teaching. The initiatives, policies and raised expectations you have brought about are in the first few weeks of implementation. Whilst there are early signs of the positive impact of these, they will require longer to embed fully.

The school has revisited its vision and values and, integral to this process, has been ensuring that all staff have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts. In collaboration with staff, a new teaching and learning policy has been implemented, which makes your high expectations clear and also ensures that the monitoring of teaching is developmental and solely focused on improving teachers' practice in the classroom. The school exudes a collective approach in its drive to become good and better and, as you stated, 'there is a shared vision and sense of purpose.'

Two members of the senior leadership team have attended training at a local teaching school on key elements to move the quality of teaching from good to outstanding. They have used this developmental opportunity to disseminate key learning points to staff and are also working alongside colleagues, on an individual basis, to improve their practice. There are plans for five more senior leaders to take part in this training so that they can share this learning and develop all staff.

The processes for monitoring the quality of teaching have been developed. Regular, short visits to lessons by leaders are conducted. The focus of these is on specific aspects of teaching; for example, the quality of teachers' marking. Staff are provided with feedback on the strengths identified and areas that require further improvement. Formal lessons are focused on the learning that has taken place. Teachers receive verbal and written feedback on the strong elements of their teaching but are also given one or two key development points that would improve their teaching further. These development points are followed up in each subsequent observations to ensure that teaching is improving.

The governing body has reduced the number of committees they have to just two to ensure they are focused on the key elements to bring about rapid improvement. One of these committees monitors the quality of teaching and learning and its members have a clear understanding of the changes that are required for the school to become at least good. The way data is presented to them has been simplified and this is enabling the governors to have a clear understanding of outcomes for pupils.

As a result, they are asking more challenging questions to holding the headteacher to account. An external review of governance has been conducted and the results of this are due to be with the school shortly.

The school development plan identifies the key actions that need to take place for it to improve. There are regular milestones built in to ensure that targets are being met. The targets for pupils' progress are, however, not specific enough to ensure that the progress they make is at least good.

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 benefiting from a range of effective external support. A local leader of education works alongside you each week to monitor the progress the school is making and a local headteacher is acting as your mentor to provide further support. A teaching school is providing targeted support for teachers to improve the quality of teaching. The local authority has brokered some of this support and is effectively monitoring the school's progress.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for North Somerset.

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe

Her Majesty's Inspector