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11 September 2014

Mrs Alison Cornell
Headteacher
Durrington Middle School
Salvington Road
Worthing
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Dear Mrs Cornell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Durrington Middle School

Following my visit to your school on 9 September 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 May 2014. 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 last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- Strengthen the school's action planning by:
 - making milestones and timescales more precise to help senior leaders check the plan's progress and help governors to hold leaders to account
 - identifying precisely how teaching will be improved by setting out a planned programme of training and support.

- Develop leadership and management by:
 - ensuring senior leaders work together to develop useful common systems to check teachers' work, and that areas noted for improvement are carefully documented and followed up to ensure impact
 - using information about pupils' progress more effectively to develop good teaching across the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, the Vice Chair of Governors and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. A telephone discussion was held with the Chair of Governors. Brief visits were made to all classes. The school's action plan was evaluated and senior leaders' documentation relating to checks on the school's work was reviewed. The checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children were also reviewed.

Context

At the end of this academic year the school is changing from a middle school to a junior school in line with the local authority's plans for the area. This means that from September 2015 the school will no longer teach pupils in Year 7. There will be a reduction in pupil numbers from four classes in each year group to three classes in each year group at the same date. As there will be fewer classes, vacancies in summer 2014 were filled with temporary staff. Building work is nearing completion. The larger office space and staffroom will enable the school to work more closely with the first school with which it is federated.

Ofsted is aware that the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) has visited the school to ascertain the robustness of this Year's Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests (SATs). The outcome of this is pending and, as a result, SATs results are yet to be published. Therefore, this matter has not been a focus of this monitoring inspection. Once the outcome of the STA visit is available and the SATs results published Ofsted will consider whether to conduct another inspection of the school.

Main findings

You, the staff team and governors were extremely disappointed by the inspection judgement in May 2014 that the school continues to require improvement. However you are all determined to move the school forward so that it is judged to be at least good when it is next inspected.

Your action plan rightly targets the majority of the areas identified for improvement at the inspection in May 2014. You collect information about pupil progress, but this information is not used well enough to improve teaching. Leaders do not effectively hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make in their class. Instead you are over-reliant on providing catch-up sessions for pupils who have fallen behind in order to raise standards. Your plan does not set out exactly what staff training will take place and, although the school year is already underway, you have not allocated staff meetings to ensure the right help is given to teachers. Valuable time has been lost.

Your assistant headteachers are working hard but are ineffective because they do not work together to develop common approaches to improving the school. For

example, new assessment systems are being developed but the proposals for reading, writing and mathematics all use different methods: this is confusing and will be unmanageable for teachers.

Your systems to check and improve the work of teachers are weak. Your timetable to visit lessons, look at work and evaluate progress does not make it clear enough precisely who will do the work, exactly what will be looked at and just when it will be done. This makes it hard to hold teachers to account. Senior leaders do not have a shared approach to recording the work they do, nor do they ensure it is usefully followed up. For example, a potentially helpful review of teachers' planning showed that not all teachers were providing the 'challenge' tasks required for more able pupils. However there was no targeted support to ensure all staff understood the requirements, and no further checks to see if the problem persists. As a result, this planning review had little impact.

Your connections with local schools have been helpful to develop areas such as the new curriculum. Your English subject leader carried out a useful visit to a school suggested by the local authority and has started to use the information gathered to develop guided reading at Durrington. This type of work is invaluable to help teachers benefit from good practice elsewhere. You have sensibly asked the LA to link you with a good or better school to support your observations of teaching.

Governors acknowledge that the action plan requires improvement to be a useful tool for them to check how well the school is doing. The Chair and Vice Chair of Governors regularly review the school's information about pupil progress. Further training is sensibly planned to help all governors to be confident to challenge the school in this area of its work. Governors have made a good start in seeing for themselves how the school operates, rather than relying on leaders' reports. For example, a governor's discussion with boys about their reading preferences is helping governors to decide spending priorities for this subject. A meeting with the local authority has been arranged to plan the reviews of governance and pupil premium required by inspectors in May 2014. This work should be carried out without delay in order to help governors develop their role.

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

Support from the local authority has up to now been light touch. Following discussion at this monitoring inspection it was agreed that more regular reviews of the school's work would be of benefit and the local authority intends to put this in place. In addition the local authority has agreed to provide support to help the school use its information about pupils' achievement effectively, and to broker further links with a local good or better school. All this needs to be tackled as soon as possible to support Durrington in its drive to improve.

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

Yours sincerely

Amanda Gard
Her Majesty's Inspector