

PROTECT-INSPECTION

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15 May 2015

Hilda Smith
William Rhodes Primary School
Hunloke Avenue
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Chesterfield
S40 2NR

Dear Mrs Smith

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Rhodes Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 third 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 the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality of written records regarding teachers' performance management and pupil progress meetings
- finalise a whole school approach to the teaching of mathematics
- add the names of individual governors and specific dates to the school improvement plan, where applicable.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, three members of the governing body, and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and considered current achievement data.

The executive headteacher took me on a tour of the school and we visited every classroom to see the learning that was taking place.

Context

The headteacher at the time of the last monitoring inspection in July 2014 left the school that summer. The headteacher of a good, local school became executive headteacher of William Rhodes Primary School in September 2014. Two teachers joined the school at the start of this academic year. A part-time teacher left in December. Two new governors have joined the governing body; one of these is now the vice-chair.

Main findings

You are improving the school. This is reflected by in school data which show improved rates of progress, particularly in Year 6 and in reading across year groups. However, given the legacy of underachievement you inherited, your time at the school constitutes a good start, and there is much work to do, particularly with the school's most-able pupils. You are fully aware of this and you have rightly concentrated on changes which can show immediate impact.

You have made effective changes to the school's improvement plan. It is now brief, accessible and appropriately focused. It would be improved further by adding specific dates and the names of individual governors where applicable; this would enable the governing body to monitor progress made against the actions more effectively.

You have successfully ensured that all teachers are consistently applying several new strategies. These include: targets displayed in all pupils' exercise books so that they can see the improvements they are making and those they need to make; increasing the opportunity for pupils to write at length; and increasing pupils' work on spelling and grammar.

You identified that teachers had become used to working in isolation. To address this, you arranged for some of your teachers to work more closely with each other and in collaboration with those from two good, local schools. This has helped increase your colleagues' confidence and it has also given them a wider range of teaching ideas from which to choose.

You are observing individual teachers' lessons every half-term. You then relate your findings to them to support their development. However, the written records of this performance management are not robust enough. This means that it is more likely that teachers do not fully address their areas for development.

There are no formal, written records of meetings to discuss pupils' progress. While you and your teachers are aware of which pupils require further support to achieve their potential, this information needs to be seen more clearly.

You and your colleagues came to the conclusion earlier in the academic year that the strategies used to teach mathematics were not meeting the needs of all pupils. You have reviewed this and have made changes to address it; this is not yet complete but you are on course to fully resolve this by the beginning of next academic year.

Your teachers have improved both their understanding and their use of achievement data. This has led to improvements in their planning. As a result, the specific needs of individual pupils are now better met than at the time of the previous inspection.

Governors have successfully undertaken much activity to increase their knowledge of the school and of the education system generally. The chair of governors has attended every information session given by the local authority. Governors have also received training from a local authority representative. As a result, they now ask more specific questions of school leaders and they understand better the challenges the school faces. The new vice-chair of governors, a former headteacher, has begun to support you personally and you appreciate the experience and advice he provides.

The governing body no longer has a committee system. Instead, the full governing body meets every half-term. This comprehensive approach ensures that all governors are invited to every meeting that takes place and, therefore, have the best chance of remaining fully informed. A governor undertook a skills audit and intends to use this information to match governors to the most appropriate school improvement areas. Governors are involved with the work of the school, for example through attending the local authority's progress review meetings, or through taking part in meetings with teachers and pupils. One governor organised a Year 6 project in collaboration with a small, rural school which increased pupils' engagement in creative writing.

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 most important step taken by the local authority was to organise the recruitment to William Rhodes Primary School of a very experienced and successful headteacher of a good, local school. This was essential to ensuring improved outcomes for children. Local authority representatives have monitored the school's performance closely; they have made eleven visits to the school this academic year, as well as conducting three progress review meetings.

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Local authority representatives have helped to arrange meetings between teachers of local schools. At these meetings, teachers' judgements on the quality of pupils' writing are agreed and quality assured. Local authority representatives made the executive headteacher aware of a significant funding opportunity that was available; the school was successful in their bid, and this has helped fund teacher development work, particularly visits to other schools to see best practice.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian McNeilly
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc. Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
cc. Local authority