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Mrs Hazel Beamish
Headteacher
Heygarth Primary School
Heygarth Road
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CH62 8AG

Dear Mrs Beamish

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heygarth Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 29 February 2016, 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in July 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

The school should take further action to:

- refine the school improvement plan so the criteria for measuring success is sharper and the role of governors in driving improvement is explicit
- plan out the actions the governing body will take to improve governance
- review the strategies for teaching writing to ensure that teachers are relentless in tackling gaps in pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher and three middle leaders to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also met with three members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. You and I visited almost every classroom to observe pupils at work and to look at their books. I evaluated your improvement plan and considered other evidence, including the 2015 validated outcomes for pupils, achievement information for pupils currently at the school and your checks on teaching. I chatted to a group of eight older pupils to gain their views of the school.

Context

There has been a considerable change to the school's context since the July inspection. You are no longer the deputy headteacher. You took up post as headteacher in September 2015. You were joined by a new deputy headteacher at the same time. Three members of the teaching staff have left. Two new teachers have joined the school. One teacher has returned to work following a period of extended absence. Almost all teachers are working with a different age range than previously.

Main findings

No one is disputing the judgements made by inspectors when they visited your school in July 2015. The findings did not come as a shock to you, the staff or the governors. Standards at Heygarth have been slipping over time.

You have moved into the role of headteacher seamlessly and wasted no time in setting the school on the right track. You have helped everyone to 'tuck the past away' and to set their sights towards a brighter future. Your vision for Heygarth is known by everyone. It is underpinning a shared and ambitious drive to eradicate weaknesses. Much has already been achieved due to your high expectations, effective actions and your steely determination to succeed.

Your work since September is making a difference because you are not content to opt for quick-fix solutions. Instead you are making changes which are getting to the heart of the matter. You have completely re-organised the role of other leaders so there is greater ownership for improvement alongside clear lines of accountability. This is building capacity and beginning to ease the load on your shoulders. New leaders are relishing their enhanced responsibilities. They are keen to make a difference. In particular, the subject leaders for English and mathematics are forging ahead. They are helping to lift the quality of teaching through their expert guidance, training and support for staff. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas because they carry out frequent checks on teaching.

Your clear action plan shows you know what needs to happen to move Heygarth forward. However, the goals for measuring your success along the way are not sharp enough. The role of governors in driving improvement is missing from your planned actions.

Members of the governing body have learned from their mistakes in the past. They are determined that weaknesses will not go unchallenged again in the future. They are putting effective safeguards in place to make sure that they are alert to any shortcomings in the school. Governors are pleased with all that has been achieved so far, but they are not allowing this to cloud their judgement. They know there is a lot of work to do to make sure pupils achieve as well as they should for their age. Governors have a good insight into the school because they visit frequently and they have a strong grasp of data. They are not sitting back, despite the praise they received in the previous inspection report. Governors are as keen to improve as everyone else. They are re-organising the way they work and reviewing their skills. Nonetheless, they are at the early stages of planning the actions they will take to become the best.

Teaching is beginning to improve. A wide range of training opportunities, coaching sessions and the chance to share good practice are all helping to lift teachers' skills and knowledge. Whole-school approaches are helping to iron out different ways of teaching so pupils are able to build on what they already know when they change year groups. The new marking policy is being followed in every classroom. Pupils are noticing the difference. They appreciate their teachers' guidance. They applaud the chance to correct mistakes and edit their own work.

Your checks on teaching are frequent, purposeful and effective. Your views of teaching across the school are spot on because you visit classrooms, review pupils' books and listen to pupils' views. You have tightened up the systems for managing teachers' performance. This is proving to be a useful tool in raising the quality of teaching. Teachers are being set ambitious targets which link well to national teaching standards and whole-school priorities.

The July inspection identified a number of strengths within the early years. These are being maintained and built on. Staff in the early years are taking your heightened expectations to heart. They are raising the bar and demanding even more from the children in their care. This means children are well prepared for future success as they move into Year 1.

The teaching of mathematics is improving strongly across most classes due to a sharper focus on problem solving. Improvements in writing are more variable. There are greater opportunities for pupils to write at length but this is not always bearing fruit. Many pupils, particularly boys, have large gaps in their writing skills due to weaker teaching over time. Teachers are not getting to grips with these gaps well enough to help pupils succeed as writers. Pupils' progress is hindered by weak punctuation, grammar and spelling skills.

The school is heading in the right direction. However, there is a long journey ahead for everyone. The 2015 results do not paint a positive picture. They explain why the school is no longer good. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 declined. Outcomes for pupils are below average and below the national floor standards. Pupils started Year 7 two terms behind their peers across the country. Disadvantaged pupils and boys fared less well than their classmates. These pupils have an even bigger journey to make in their secondary school.

Your information on progress for pupils currently attending Heygarth shows an improving picture. More pupils are making the progress they should and standards in reading, writing and mathematics are beginning to rise. Nonetheless, there is more to do to make sure pupils capitalise on their strong start in Nursery and Reception. Despite the rapid progress the current Year 6 have made since September, this group still have a long way to go to reach the standards expected for their age.

Pupils are proud of their school and full of praise for the recent changes. They are enjoying greater challenge in their learning because they are no longer going over old ground. Pupils point to improvements in behaviour which means they feel safe and can get the most out of teaching because their learning is not disrupted.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

You are making the most of the close and purposeful support available through the local authority and your partnership with other schools in the locality. Teachers and subject leaders are benefiting from the effective support provided by local authority officers. This is raising the quality of teaching and ensuring that leaders are equipped with the skills to fulfil their roles. You are harnessing the expertise of other headteachers to validate your judgements on teaching, as well as gaining an external view of the school's progress. Frequent meetings with a local authority representative are helpful in identifying next steps and ensuring you are receiving the right support to bring about change.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector