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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Rachel Purvis
Headteacher
William Rhodes Primary School
Hunloke Avenue
Boythorpe
Chesterfield
Derbyshire
S40 2NR

Dear Mrs Purvis

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to William Rhodes Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 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 that you gave to me and for the time that you made available to discuss the actions that 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 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection, the school was also judged to require improvement.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection, in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with the headteacher, representatives of the governing body, including the chair, and a group of the staff with leadership responsibilities. I met with representatives of the local authority. I visited all classrooms and held discussions with pupils during my tour. I looked at safeguarding records and evaluated the latest version of the school development plan.

Context

You took over as headteacher of the school in April 2016.

Main findings

Over the full period of time since the most recent inspection, the pace of improvement at the school has been too slow, given the likely timing and importance of the next inspection. The pace of improvement has quickened markedly since Easter.

I found no evidence of any lack of will on the part of leaders, governors or the local authority to bring about the necessary improvements at the school. It has been the case, nevertheless, that the task has been difficult and the circumstances complicated. As a result, it has taken a long time to put in place long-term arrangements for the leadership of the school. That has had a noticeable effect on the pace of improvement.

I found evidence of improvements that were made before Easter. For example, the mathematics coordinator has implemented important changes in the way that the pupils are taught problem-solving skills. The impact is apparent in the pupils' work and in their responses in lessons. These are particular and localised improvements, however, and the fundamental improvements needed in the culture, climate and ethos of the school are only just, though increasingly, becoming apparent.

You, your staff, the governors and the local authority now share a clear and consistent view of what is needed to improve the school. All of you give a strong sense that you are now working collectively on an agreed set of priorities for the school. You have set out the priorities unequivocally in your school improvement plan. The priorities are linked closely to the areas for improvement identified at the inspection.

Too few of the actions proposed in the plan make clear exactly what it is that you will do in the run-up to the next inspection. The plan does not indicate clearly by when the proposed actions are supposed to be completed. That means that you and the governors cannot know whether the plan is on track, or not, and cannot take action quickly, if things go wrong, or you are able to bring about improvements more quickly than you anticipated. Also, the plan does not have enough measures by which you and the governors can judge for yourselves how successful the actions have been. I have asked you to revise the plan and to send a copy to me.

The central challenge that you face is to overcome and to reverse a long-standing history of mediocre achievement by the pupils. Actions taken previously by senior leaders, the governing body and the local authority have been sufficient to prevent

any decline at the school, but they have not been enough to date to bring about quickly the level of improvement that is needed.

The school is now emerging from a period in the doldrums. Leaders, managers and the governing body exhibit a sense of revived confidence and professionalism. As a result, actions to bring about the necessary improvements are now being implemented quickly and with enthusiasm. You are making effective use of professional development and training for the staff. That is contributing to the changing culture now evident at the school. The staff feel able to be more creative than before in developing ways for pupils to learn, which inspires the pupils to want to learn and to do well. The effects are being noted by the pupils.

The pupils told me that learning is becoming more interesting. You have introduced a lot of new things into the curriculum. The pupils were keen to show me examples of work and displays about a wide variety of subjects, topics and activities that they have done. They spoke wide-eyed and with a sense of the excitement that those things had brought to their learning. In the classrooms, I saw how the pupils are willing to learn and can concentrate on the tasks that they are given. The pupils spoke also about the positive effect of some things that you have done to help parents to play a bigger part in supporting the pupils' education, such as the family assemblies. Those things are having a positive effect on the pupils' attitudes to learning.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I have recommended to Ofsted that I stay in contact with the school and am likely to visit again to check that the very recent improvements have been sustained and built upon.

External support

The local authority has sustained a consistent level of support for the school throughout the prolonged period of difficulty that the school has experienced. The support has helped to shore up the school during that time. The local authority has been instrumental in helping the governors to resolve particular problems. It has also provided particular pieces of support that have led to some practical improvements, such as in the teaching of mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector