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Dear Mrs Du Cros

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: leadership of more than one school

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 and 17 November 2010 to look at the leadership of the federation.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to a national report. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributors or contributing institutions but individuals and institutions will not be identified in the main text without your consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors, staff, parents, a local authority representative and learners; and the scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The effectiveness of the federation leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement is satisfactory.

Context

The Pine Ridge and Lorraine Schools federation was formed in September 2008. In addition to Lorraine School and Pine Ridge Infant and Nursery School, it includes a private nursery on each school site managed by the governing body and a children's centre on the Pine Ridge site. The federation caters for children and pupils aged two to seven years. The two schools are approximately one mile apart. The federation is led by an executive headteacher. The current executive headteacher has been in post since September 2010.

Outcomes

- Pupils' attainment in the Lorraine school is rising. Assessment information shows that pupils in Year 2 are well placed to attain standards that are above average. This is a result of the improved quality of learning in lessons because of the strengthening of provision that has been driven by the federation. Since the federation, pupils at Pine Ridge continue to reach average standards by the end of Year 2.
- Improvements at Lorraine School, since the formation of the federation, have resulted in much improved behaviour which is now good. This now matches the good behaviour of pupils at Pine Ridge Infant school.
- Pupils' attendance is generally low across the federation. The federation has taken steps to remedy this and has had some success in reducing the persistent absence rate at Lorraine School.
- Pupils report how much they enjoy the joint activities they take part in, such as the federation clubs and school trips. This aids their confidence in transition to the junior school where they report that they meet pupils from the other federation school who they already know.
- Pupils' adoption of a healthy lifestyle across the federation is a strong feature because of the high quality of physical education (PE) and its leadership. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the daily exercise activities, regular PE lessons, sports clubs and events such as the sports week where coaches from a wide range of sports are involved. Assessment shows that as well as improving sports skills, listening skills are also improved as a result of this high-quality provision.

Provision

- The major improvement to the provision as a result of the federation has been the much stronger teaching and curriculum at the Lorraine school. Strong leadership has driven improvements; such as implementing a good curriculum plan where none existed prior to the federation.
- As a result of the federation, teaching has strengthened. Federation teachers plan together and share ideas regularly. This ensures that the equality of opportunity for pupils across the federation is secure. An additional effect is the very high quality of display in all classrooms. However, improvements to teaching are not as swift as they could be because there are insufficient opportunities for teachers to work together in the classroom and learn from each other.
- The federation provides comprehensive Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children in the community. Past inspections show that this has led to good outcomes in the different settings. However, these settings have not worked together in partnership as closely as they could. This situation has been remedied. Regular meetings between settings are

already leading to improvements such as the sharing of resources and the streamlining of planning.

- The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is adequate. School leaders have, however, recognised the importance of developing procedures, such as provision mapping, across the federation so that they can guarantee that the provision is tailored to meet pupils' individual needs.
- The children's centre helps to ensure that the care, guidance and support for children and their families is of a high quality. It is successful in ensuring that nearly all users in the community are able to access services in part because of the comprehensive early years coverage of the federation.

Leadership and management

- Leadership from the previous and current executive headteachers is evidently strong. They demonstrate good capacity for federation leadership. For example, they rightly identified that the major priority for the federation in its early stages was to harness the skills and expertise in Pine Ridge to support improvements in the education of pupils in the Lorraine school and then successfully driving those improvements forward.
- Leadership overall is, however, satisfactory because other federation leaders have had insufficient opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, while taking part in lesson observations leaders identified accurately inconsistencies in teaching, but were not responsible for ensuring that the improvements were made. Recently this situation has changed. For example, teachers now have the responsibility for coordinating subject development across the federation. In addition, the headteacher is supported by two able deputy headteachers who are relishing the opportunity to take greater responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. At the time of this visit, the impact of these changes was not apparent.
- The leadership of administration and finance, particularly as the bursar has five budgets to manage, is a very strong feature of federation leadership. Resources are streamlined and great care is taken to check that decisions made ensure the best value for money. This is highly supportive of other federation leaders who are able to concentrate on improving teaching and learning.
- The governing body successfully established the federation and demonstrates that it knows and supports the federation's work. For example, in the early stages they led meetings with parents to overcome their anxiety about the federation, so that now the majority spoken to accepted that it is beneficial.
- The biggest barrier to the federation was the anxiety of local parents who were particularly loyal to one school or the other. This barrier has been

largely overcome and has had an impact on improving community cohesion as parents from both schools now meet regularly at such events as the Christmas Fair.

- The governing body agrees that they have benefited from the local authority's effective support. The local authority facilitated the successful federation of the schools by providing good quality advice, additional resources and consultant support to improve teaching.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Strengthen federation leadership at all levels so that the deputy headteachers drive forward improvements to teaching and learning more effectively and subject coordinators have a greater influence on the federation curriculum
- Further strengthen the consistency and quality of teaching across the federation by giving the teachers more opportunity to work alongside each other in classrooms.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop the leadership of the federation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector