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Mr S West
Headteacher
Sawtry Junior School
Middlefield Road
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Huntingdon
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Dear Mr West

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Sawtry Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 26 November 2012, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, two representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. A brief visit was made to each classroom. The school development plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection, four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, have resigned, leaving five vacancies which the governing body is seeking to fill. There have been no substantive staff changes, although two teachers who were absent at the time of the inspection have returned to work. One teacher has taken an extended leave of absence and another, who is a key middle leader, is also due to take extended leave.

Main findings

Senior leaders and governors accept the findings of the recent inspection and acknowledge that the report sets clear and helpful priorities for further improvement. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have been quick to draft their response by revising the school's 'termly operational plan', which sets out planned actions under three broad headings:

- strengthening leadership
- improving teaching and learning
- developing the school as a learning community.

Some actions have already started: a revised marking policy has been drawn up, and steps have been taken to improve communication with parents. However, senior leaders do not articulate clearly what they expect or how they want teaching to improve. It is not, for example, apparent that the school is sharing best-practice in lesson planning, in marking or developing the role of teaching assistants. The headteacher has not found it easy to delegate responsibility for leading improvements to middle leaders. Moreover, procedures for reviewing the impact of planned actions are weak.

Governors have supported the school, but have not provided enough challenge. They recognise the urgent need for the governing body to return to full strength so that responsibilities can be shared and their effectiveness can be improved. In the past, governors have not been sufficiently well-informed to be able to hold the school to account. They are now seeking ways to build up their knowledge, for example by attending moderation sessions in English and mathematics. The governing body has no separate action plan and its impact has not been reviewed.

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 quality of teaching by focusing the planned actions on aspects of teaching and the use of assessment that need rapid improvement
- review the role and impact of the governing body so it can better monitor the school's performance and effectively steer its strategic development.

HMI will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority keeps a close eye on the school's performance so that it can provide suitable challenge and a proportionate level of support. Prior to the last inspection, an external consultant was deployed to strengthen the school's self-evaluation and improve its development planning. The impact of this additional guidance can be seen in the improved results in the most recent Key Stage 2

assessments. However, the local authority recognises the need for further intervention and support. Training is scheduled for the governing body and a review of special educational needs provision is planned.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire Local Authority.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector