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19 December 2012

Mrs Martine Buckley  
Headteacher  
Mather Street Primary School  
Mather Street  
Failsworth  
Manchester  
Lancashire  
M35 0DT

Dear Mrs Buckley

**Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Mather Street Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 December 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 October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

**Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with the Executive Headteacher and Head of School, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school's action plans were evaluated and other documents and records of progress were checked. Minutes of recent governing body meetings were scrutinised, along with several policies put in place to standardise some systems and procedures between Mather Street and Yew Tree school, its partner in the hard federation.

**Context**

There have been no staff changes since the inspection in October, although one teacher has resigned with effect from the end of this term.

## **Main findings**

It was recognised during the school's inspection in October that its recently introduced federated leadership team had quickly gained an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The executive headteacher, head of school and other leaders from the federation are continuing to enhance the school's capacity to make more rapid improvement. Their rigorous monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment provide a strong steer to the work of teaching and support staff. The school's action plans are clear and concise and focus on the key areas for improvement identified at the inspection. These priorities are mirrored in the whole-school development plans, with additional information that is well-organised and regularly updated. This helps to ensure that staff and governors understand and share the school's vision and what actions need to be taken to achieve it. Teachers receive regular and constructive feedback on the quality of their work and opportunities for training and development to improve their practice. Leaders recognise that there is much work still to do to bring about teaching that is consistently good or better. They have put into place a range of procedures, policies and expectations that teachers find helpful in guiding their work. A focus on the quality of assessment is improving teachers' accuracy and understanding of the levels at which pupils are working and what should be done to improve their progress. Most staff are beginning to understand the sense of urgency that is required to move pupils' learning on more rapidly to raise standards in reading, writing and mathematics across the school. It is too early to be certain that all staff are rising to this challenge, so leaders' monitoring in the coming months will be important in identifying and remedying any aspects of underperformance.

Joint governance arrangements are now fully established and benefit from the range of skills available between the federated schools. Members of the governing body are improving their knowledge of the school's performance and their ability to hold it to account. They willingly engage in training and development activities to improve their skills in challenging leaders through questioning. Governors who spoke with the inspector agreed that a recent meeting of the 'MY Schools Together' governing body was interesting and interactive, engaging them in discussions and debate around an agenda which focused on the school's targets for improvement. The minutes of the meeting confirmed that governors asked questions of the leadership team and consequently increased their knowledge of what actions are being taken and how all staff should be held to account for pupils' progress.

The establishment of 'subject leadership groups' is at an early stage but is contributing to the development of appropriate knowledge and skills for subject leaders. Partnership working between the two schools is helping to build up a team approach by which teaching staff are extending their experience and learning from other colleagues. Flexibility in the deployment of staff will be possible in the future due to the 'federation employment contracts'. Leaders and the governing body are prioritising finances carefully to get best value from key decisions and meet the challenge of maintaining a balanced budget at the Mather Street site. The school is also analysing the progress and attendance of different groups and cohorts of pupils to ensure that actions can be taken to narrow gaps in their attainment. This tracking of pupils' achievements is more precise than in the past due to the increasing accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment and progress in key areas of reading, writing and mathematics. This is due to the work of senior leaders and other federation colleagues in moderating teachers' assessments and providing appropriate training.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommends that further action is taken to:

- encourage the governing body to take account of the Ofsted survey reports on 'Leadership of more than one School' (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/leadership-of-more-one-school>) and
- 'School Governance ; learning from the best' (<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best>)

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

### **External support**

The local authority has provided intervention and support to the school for some time, leading up to the period in which it recommended a hard federation arrangement. This is having a positive impact on Mather Street School through the brokering of the initial support then partnership with Yew Tree Primary. The authority will continue to conduct regular checks on the school, receiving updates from senior leaders on the impact of the federation's work on pupils' rates of progress.

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

Yours sincerely

Marguerite Murphy  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**