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Mrs Rosalind Wilson
Consultant Headteacher
Longshaw Nursery School
Crosby Road
Blackburn
Lancashire
BB2 3NF

Dear Mrs Wilson

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 to Longshaw School

Following my visit to your school on 5 March 2013, 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 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the consultant headteacher, the acting headteacher, the childcare manager, two members of the governing body and two local authority officers. The inspector also made two short visits to the Nursery classroom during the morning and afternoon sessions. The school improvement plan, minutes from governing body meetings and the school's evaluation of their work since the inspection were also evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection of the Nursery School, the Children's Centre and Childcare provision have been inspected. The consultant headteacher is in post until the end of the spring term. The acting headteacher is on a phased return following a period of extended leave. She will return to her post full time after the Easter break. The

governing body are in formal discussions with the local authority on the future of the Children's Centre.

Main findings

Senior leaders accept the inspection judgement was accurate and are determined to bring about the necessary improvements to regain their status as a good school. Tackling the shortcomings identified in the inspection report is a high priority, despite calls on senior leaders' time with other inspection activities. The planned actions to secure improvement are sound and provide a good overview of how the school will work in partnership with the local authority to bring about change. Nonetheless, the plan is not helping leaders to drive improvement with greater urgency because the timescales for completing actions are too broad. This is already leading to some slippage. The criteria to measure success do not identify the difference the school's actions will make to teaching or pupils' achievement and the procedures to monitor and evaluate the school's work are unclear. There is insufficient detail about the role of governors in shaping the school's journey to success.

The school have rightly placed a heavy emphasis on improving teaching and pupils' behaviour through whole-school training and opportunities for staff to visit other settings. A focus on speaking and listening is helping staff to shape their discussions with pupils while a local authority officer has supported staff in planning activities and capturing children's achievements in their Learning Journals. Senior leaders are acting as role models in the Nursery classroom to show-case best practice. Nevertheless, there have been too few opportunities for senior leaders to monitor the impact of their actions on the quality of teaching. Performance management procedures and observation of teaching are not being exploited well enough to provide adults with precise feedback and guidance to help them improve.

The school has been busy since the inspection. It has taken successful action to establish essential systems to secure improvement. The working times and routines of all staff have been restructured so there are dedicated slots for staff to meet and plan together. This means there are greater opportunities for whole-school training which is leading to a more cohesive approach to teaching. Support for behaviour management means the behaviour policy has been revisited and the systems for tackling weaker behaviour are becoming more consistent. There are good arrangements in place to ensure the transition in leadership runs smoothly and the focus on improving the school does not falter.

Members of the governing body know the school well. They have a realistic understanding of the barriers that are preventing the school from moving forward more quickly and have clear plans in place to resolve these issues. However, it is too early to see the full impact of their decisive action. They have secured the phased return to work of the acting headteacher and ensured she has the time to drive improvement. Governors have been actively involved in restructuring working routines, attended staff training and frequently visit the Nursery classroom.

Consequently they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and they are aiding senior leaders to tackle weaknesses.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take 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:

- as a matter of urgency, ensure senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and provide staff with clear guidance of what they need to do to improve
- review the school's planned actions to ensure timescales for completing activities are tighter; there are clear procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's work and the criteria to measure success link to improvements in the quality of teaching and children's achievement.

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

External support

Governors and senior staff welcome the effective additional support provided by the local authority. This is because they are working in close partnership with local authority officers to tailor extra help to meet the needs of the school. Support from a local authority officer with Early Years expertise is helping senior leaders identify precisely what steps they need to take to improve teaching. Half-termly meetings with the Director of Education and Schools are proving beneficial in tackling some of the barriers to bringing about improvement while ensuring the school receives appropriate support.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector