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Mrs Paula Judd
Headteacher
Middlefield Community Primary School
Alderwood Avenue
Speke
Liverpool
Merseyside
L24 2UE

Dear Mrs Judd

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Middlefield Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, governors, a representative of the local authority, staff and pupils. The school action plan was evaluated. I went on a tour of the school and was able to see many pupils taking part in a wide variety of activities. I spent some time studying the local authority's monitoring reports of the school, minutes of meetings of the governing body and information on pupils' progress.

Context

There have been no changes in staffing or governance since the previous inspection. A small group of more able pupils are now being taught separately for some parts of the week. This is in order to equip them with the skills to aim for the higher levels in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2.

Main findings

The inspection judgement came as no surprise in January. A local authority review last year identified weaknesses in both teaching and mathematics. Actions to tackle such weaknesses lacked urgency and teaching did not improve quickly enough. School leaders feel that the inspection has given them a mandate: they are determined to make sure that the school is on a sustainable path to improvement.

A well-targeted and highly focused action plan has very quickly been drawn up to turn the school into a place where 'good is the norm'. There was clear evidence during the visit that actions that have been taken are already helping the school to improve.

The programme to improve teaching tackles the issue from many sides. Extra training has been put on for staff and a new format for planning teaching and learning has been introduced. As a consequence teachers are starting to plan activities and tasks that match more closely the abilities of their pupils. Teachers have noticed that lesson observations by senior leaders are 'more focused, more specific and more frequent'. Local authority representatives who have conducted joint lesson observations with senior leaders have noted improvements in teaching.

Pupils have also noticed that they have more opportunities in lessons to work on their own or with partners. As one pupil commented: 'Our teacher's changed – now she lets us get on with it. She only says what she needs to – and this shows us just what we can do for ourselves'. Pupils also remarked that 'the work has got harder' and the more able pupils that I spoke to enjoy having lessons that are more of a challenge.

Standards are rising. The revised tracking system is much better and gives teachers a far clearer idea about the progress of pupils in their classes. It helps teachers to spot when pupils are not doing as well as they should be and enables teachers to put in appropriate support so that pupils can catch up. This is already having a positive impact. According to school information, backed up by the local authority, pupils are on target to perform much better this year, with a far greater proportion of pupils making expected, and better than expected, progress in English and mathematics.

School leaders conduct formal meetings where they question teachers about the progress of pupils in their classes. This more structured approach is starting to change the culture of the school and staff know they will be held to account for pupils' progress. This process gives the opportunity for senior leaders to praise teachers when they are working well, as well as challenge underperformance.

The governing body is a well-meaning group of individuals who are very loyal to the school. Governors have sometimes in the past felt uncomfortable in challenging the headteacher. Involvement in the 'Challenge Board' meetings, organised by the local authority, helps governors to have a clearer picture of where the school is up to and also increases their confidence in holding the school to account. The governing body now needs to use its powers to set much more challenging targets for teachers. It also needs to make sure that all staff clearly understand the implications of the link between students' progress and annual pay increases. In this way, governors will be supporting the school in its drive to improve quickly.

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 recommend that further action is taken to:

- refine the action plan further by making a greater proportion of the success criteria more clearly measurable so that progress in improvement can be checked easily and regularly
- increase the role of the governing body in checking up whether actions to drive the school forward are having the required impact
- tighten up arrangements for performance management so that staff are set challenging targets to make sure pupils make good progress
- increase the frequency of assessments so that teachers can put support in place more quickly if pupils are underachieving

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

External support

The local authority is providing an intensive package of support to the school, particularly to improve pupils' progress in mathematics and also the overall quality of teaching. This is already making a difference; for example, pupils are finding that teaching styles have improved and the work is better suited to their needs. The local authority is supporting the governing body in strengthening the degree of challenge and scrutiny that school leaders are being subjected to. Links with a school run by a National Leader in Education, organised through the local authority, appear promising but it is too early to see evidence of impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.