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Mrs D Simpson
Headteacher
Great Preston VC CofE Primary School
Preston Lane
Great Preston
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Dear Mrs Simpson

Serious Weaknesses inspection of Great Preston VC CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, several other school leaders, a local authority representative and the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body. The local authority's statement of action and school-development plans were evaluated. The inspector also briefly visited every class in the school.

Context

Since the inspection one teacher has resigned and three others are absent due to illness. The school has employed four interim teachers to cover the classes affected.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school's leaders have not let their disappointment with the judgement from the inspection in January distract them from working hard to tackle the identified areas for improvement which they acknowledge are accurate, but assert were already

known to them and being addressed. To this end, leaders have reviewed, modified and sought to enhance almost every aspect of the school's work in an attempt to rapidly address the school's shortcomings. This included a frank, root and branch evaluation of the value for money provided by all staff and the suitability and impact of existing policies and systems. This appraisal informed the school's development planning and brought to light some uncomfortable truths and matters that have had to be dealt with forcefully. The focused and proactive headteacher, supported by her enthusiastic and talented team of leaders are rolling out a set of strategic actions designed to raise pupils' achievement, improve the quality and impact of teaching and increase the effectiveness of leadership throughout the school. Central to this strategy has been a change in ethos, including: the introduction of a 'no excuses' culture; clarifying staff roles and duties; adapting curriculum provision; raising staff expectations and awareness of what pupils are capable of; encouraging pupils to be more ambitious and take some responsibility for their own learning; and increased rigour and regularity in tracking and evaluation processes and assessment methods. There is also a focus on holding staff to account for their performance. Underpinning these developments has been some high-quality coaching, training and mentoring, and work to ensure staff understand the rationale behind the major changes taking place. There has also been a greater emphasis on identifying and intervening to improve the progress of pupils who are at risk of, or are already underachieving, with specialist support and guidance. This has been done against a backdrop of some turbulence in staffing which has not aided the school's cause or continuity in children's learning.

The school's latest data indicate that more pupils are regaining the lost ground in their learning caused by their previous underachievement. The data also suggests that the 2013 Year 6 national test results will significantly exceed those achieved in 2012, particularly for the proportion of pupils gaining above age-related levels. Recent monitoring of teaching shows that the number of lessons where teaching is good or better is rising. Leadership responsibility is being distributed more widely within the school.

These events show that the actions taken to date are having a positive impact. However, the key challenge for the school will be to provide inspectors with sufficiently compelling evidence at its next section 5 inspection that the school's effectiveness has improved sufficiently for the serious weaknesses judgement to be removed.

Governors, while committed and ambitious for the school recognise that over time they have fallen short of holding the school's leaders sufficiently to account for pupils' slow progress. Steps have been taken to rectify this and just before the inspection in January, a new Chair, vice-chair and several other new governors were appointed. A governor development plan is being implemented to help ensure governors are better equipped to be more discerning in their support and challenge of the school's performance and their appraisal of the senior staff responsible.

Governors have also forged an alliance with, and are taking advice from, the governing body of an outstanding school. They have reconstituted their committee structure to ensure a sharper focus on the school's key priorities.

The school is part of a collaborative trust comprising several local primary schools and the local high school. Collectively, they are providing some effective leadership, teaching and learning and assessment support, advice and guidance which are helping to accelerate the school's improvement. By pooling resources, they have made a number of joint appointments, including literacy and numeracy strategy leaders to embed excellent practice across the trust and boost pupils' achievement. The local authority also offers some valuable support to the school. This has included the brokering of the link with an outstanding school and establishing the joint review group to monitor and evaluate the school's progress in tackling its weaknesses.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose

The school's development plan is fit for purpose.

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

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector