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Ms Ruth Harrison
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Ms Harrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Park View Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 17 July 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 May 2013. My visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I toured the school and met with you, coordinators of English and mathematics, teaching assistants, members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's post-Ofsted action plan, and looked at the school development plan and self-evaluation. I considered a sample of pupils' work and talked with nine pupils in Key Stage 2.

Context

Since the inspection there have been changes to staffing to support work with children in the early years. The nursery class now has an extra teaching assistant. A teacher trained in early years and a teaching assistant have been appointed to start in September. Three temporary staff will finish work in a few days. A teacher already in the school who has expertise will lead the Early Years and Foundation Stage from September. The senior leadership structure is in the process of being reviewed and posts will be advertised externally. Building work has been agreed with the local authority for 2013-14 to take out surplus places and improve both indoor and outdoor space for children in early years. A further key point of context is that as Executive Headteacher you work across two schools and have been able to increase your days at Park View after the inspection.

Main findings

You have written a post-Ofsted action plan, in addition to the school development plan and self-evaluation documents. Steps in the action plan are sound and practical. All the issues for action in the report are covered, with the extra priority of improving reading. Figures that go with the action plan about pupils' reading justify why it is a priority too. The accompanying self-evaluation uses hard data about actual levels of achievement as a basis for realistic understanding of what needs to be done. You have gathered good recent information about national and school test results for the current year.

As Executive Headteacher, you have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and your role is having a positive impact. Examples of this are well-focused intervention and improvement in mathematics in all key stages, and moderation of assessments with other schools. In mathematics, targeted programmes of 8 to 10 weeks have led to progress of, on average, 8 to 10 months in skills. This is reflected in provisional results for 2013 which show big gains in progress compared to 2012. You have been willing to challenge established practices and assumptions, such as widening the evidence about the impact of teaching, and tackling inadequate teaching with support and higher expectations.

However, the action plan cannot yet be tracked properly for impact or form a backbone for performance management. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, neither the post-Ofsted action plan nor the development plan uses enough measurable data to show where the school is now and target firmly where it will be. Secondly, too many people are listed for each step, so it is hard to see who is really responsible. Thirdly, timescales not clear enough; some rely on 'ongoing' or give start but not end dates.

Governors are committed to the school. The Chair of Governors has taken the initiative to make firmer links with The Dean Trust to support the school in areas of weakness. There are intentions to have better reporting and accountability to governors' committees. However, these steps have not happened swiftly enough. Governors feel that they did not get good information in the past, so do have wide experience of working with data, accountability and challenge. They have tried to find good training but were let down by its quality, and the learning curve to improve governance is steep.

I saw samples of pupils' work in Key Stage 2 and talked with pupils about it and what had changed recently. Pupils had noticed changes that helped them improve: marking of their written work now gives more small and specific 'next steps' for improvement that they can act on; mathematics learning, including real life projects like enterprise challenge, has become more fun, which is motivating; pupils are sometimes set different work that challenges the more able. There were recent examples in books of this happening. Their advice to younger pupils about how to improve was to 'challenge yourself', not do the same kind of work all the time. 'Don't be scared', pupils said, because there is help. Learn from mistakes. As one pupil put it for writing: 'don't use good words: use great words!'

In the small sample of books that I saw, writing was extended, ambitious in sentence structure and vocabulary, varied in style and purpose. In one class, IT was used well to improve the finished products. Provisional results for writing have improved for 2013. However, in some otherwise good work, a small number of basic spellings and handwriting needed more care. Reading results have not improved. Actions in the plan aim for catch up programmes for some pupils but also building up a love of reading more widely.

In the nursery, an early start had been made on improving resources. Outside, there is new water, sand and large number equipment, and indoors large construction blocks. Teaching assistants had noticed improvements, such as more girls using construction equipment and children counting in number games. Staff talk about children's progress often but this lacks structure and should be on a more formal basis.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action as below.

- For the post-Ofsted action plan, by September 2013:
 - use baselines and measurable targets to show impact and progress;
 - hold staff more accountable by identifying specific staff for particular actions;
 - give firmer start and completion dates to actions;
 - form a single workable plan for the school with post-Ofsted actions clearly identified.
- To improve capacity of the governing body, by October 2013:
 - put arrangements in place to track progress on the plan, to understand the school's performance compared to others, and better hold senior staff to account;
 - the local authority to arrange for the review of governance which it proposes.
- To improve children's learning in early years, by October 2013:
 - staff to meet to review the progress of children in a more structured way;
 - make the indoor area in the nursery more stimulating, as in the well used new construction area which has photographs to prompt activity.
- I will visit in the Autumn Term to discuss progress on the action plan, final test and assessment results, and to provide a governor development session.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The school is drawing well upon the external support of partners and the local authority. The local authority has advised to improve resources and use of space in the nursery and had rightly identified the school as of concern before the inspection. The Dean Trust and Ashton-on-Mersey Training School have given a range of effective coaching, advice, work at the school, and visits to see outstanding practice, contributing to better standards in mathematics and to middle leadership capacity. Links with successful schools in the local primary cluster have worked well to improve the accuracy of assessment. The brokered governor training course from another local authority has not been effective and the school should look at other ways to improve governance.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey
Her Majesty's Inspector