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11 July 2013

Miss Jenny Haunch
Headteacher
Washacre Primary School
Clough Avenue
Westhoughton
Bolton
Lancashire
BL5 2NJ

Dear Miss Haunch

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Washacre Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 10 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave before and during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the Director of Children's Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good or better throughout the school and so raise pupils' achievement and speed up their progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring:
 - teachers do not talk for too long so that pupils keep their concentration and have more time to learn and think for themselves, and to complete work on their own
 - teachers use the accurate information that is now available about pupils' progress to plan challenging lessons for all abilities, especially the more able
 - teachers have the skills to support pupils effectively with their reading when they share books in small group sessions
 - pupils have more opportunities to develop and practise their writing skills in different subjects
 - pupils have more opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems
 - pupils behave consistently well in lessons without needing regular reminders from staff.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the performance of different groups of pupils
 - ensuring, as a matter of urgency, that the interim executive board takes steps to appoint teachers with the necessary expertise to lead and manage different subjects.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 10 July 2013

Evidence

I met with you, the deputy headteacher and leader of English; the local authority school improvement officer and the local authority member of the Interim Executive Board (IEB). I held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the IEB. I visited all classrooms, observing all teachers teach; some long sessions and some shorter sessions. I looked at several documents including your review of the progress of the school and the records of your checks of teacher performance, scrutinised pupil progress information and looked at your school improvement plan for the coming year.

Context

Since my last visit you have made several important changes in staffing. Teachers in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 received extended contracts until at least the end of the academic year. A senior teacher was appointed to provide leadership for English and the Key Stage 2 phase. A teacher returned from maternity leave in May and takes small groups of pupils. You are shortly holding interviews for a replacement teacher in Year 2 from September as the current Year 2 teacher returns to her own school after secondment.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Since my last visit you have remained steadfast in your ambition to raise the quality of teaching and improve achievement for all pupils at Washacre. Together with the IEB you have retained or appointed staff equal to this task and are creating a team which reflects your vision. Through the fresh eyes of the new deputy headteacher there is increased impetus to achieve success as your skills are not spread thinly by trying to fulfil too many different roles within the school. His specific job in leading on the quality of teaching and learning enables you to concentrate on steering the school, strategically, on its journey to success.

Bringing complementary skills to this leadership team is the English leader. The programmes of support and challenge to improve teaching continue. You all check classroom practice, interrogate pupil progress information and scrutinise pupils' work books to provide a secure picture of the quality of teaching and achievement of all groups of pupils. Any weaknesses identified in teaching are supported with an action plan and specific targets, with the expectation that improvements will be swift. Your senior leaders use coaching methods to support colleagues and they often model in their own classrooms an approach which has been discussed. This is due to your example of how you want them to fulfil their roles and the time given to develop their skills.

You are continuing to cultivate the confidence of several members of staff in order for them to take on the roles of middle leaders. A few teachers have already taken on these roles with enthusiasm, for example, the science leader and the leader for Early Years Foundation Stage. You have made your expectations clear so that they have written action plans to move their subject forward and they are starting to use the same systems as senior leaders to check on pupils' progress in an array of aspects across the school. From September you will have more teachers leading and developing different subjects. This will aid the quicker

progress needed in allowing pupils to use their writing and problem-solving skills in a variety of situations.

Members of the Interim Executive Board are working hard to support improvements in the school. Through regular meetings they ask you and your senior leaders searching questions about the action you have taken and the link to better pupil progress. It would be helpful if some examples of this challenge were recorded so that it is crystal clear how rigorous they are in fulfilling their duty. The IEB has released significant funding to enable purchase of resources to help pupils have the books they need for reading and equipment in mathematics.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The headteacher and the IEB have managed to employ teachers for most of this academic year so that pupils have not had to get used to different teachers on a regular basis. Great strides have been made in ensuring there are enough permanent teachers from September 2013 with a re-organisation of roles and contracts.
- Leadership responsibilities have been shared as new teachers have joined the school or existing teachers stepped up to the higher expectations.
- Pupils' achievement is improving because teachers are keen to improve their practice and welcome advice and guidance to do so. From the lesson observations I made it is clear that teachers have generally taken to heart the advice about not talking too long at the start of lessons so capturing pupils' attention with problem-solving activities based on real life situations. In Year 4/5, I watched as pupils persevered with problems of buying refreshments for a party within a set budget; and maintained their resilience as the teacher added fresh problems like 'now sandwiches are 25% reduced'.
- Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics show a rise on the 2012 figures in the number of pupils reaching the expected and the higher level. Current information on Year 6 shows an equally significant rise on results in the three subjects on last year. Across the school, pupils have made much swifter progress in the last two terms reflecting better teaching. Teachers are becoming more confident in awarding the correct levels to pieces of pupils work through the discussions they have with senior leaders and through a mix of external checks.
- Teachers use pupils' progress information to set activities which more or less match the needs of different groups of pupils; although there is room for activities to allow more-able pupils to work more swiftly. Teachers were seen to move around the classroom during lessons to check if pupils needed help. Pupils' books are marked regularly with a system known to the pupils and targets are regularly reviewed so pupils are beginning to know what more they need to do to improve their work.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- The decline in pupils' achievement overall has been halted and rates of progress across the school have accelerated. Senior leaders are improving teaching so that pupils are generally engaged and learning is not interrupted by any behaviour incidents. Nevertheless, although progress in writing is improving, it remains a distinct area for improvement, especially writing across different subjects. Similarly, leadership has a challenge to sustain an overall rapid rate of progress if pupils are to reach higher levels, especially for the more-able pupils.
- Although all groups of pupils are making similar progress, the gap in attainment between some pupils who need extra help in class and others, and those pupils who are eligible for

extra funding are wider than expected, especially toward the upper end of Key Stage 2. Despite the school knowing this and having systems in place to remedy the problem, it must be given constant attention.

- New teachers joining the school present both opportunities and challenges. It is vital that any new staff receive a thorough grounding in the values of the school and are given specific information about their roles to enable them to contribute effectively to the school's improvement.
- Members of the IEB offer specific expertise to the improvement of the school. Plans are in place for the recruitment of new governors to eventually take the place of the IEB. Nonetheless, it is essential that those recruited have a sufficiently wide range of skills to be able to support and challenge the school at the level necessary for future improvement.
- Pupils join the school at a variety of points during their school career and the school must plan carefully for these pupils so that swift learning can start immediately.

External support

The local authority has invested time, energy and funds in supporting the school. Officers have organised a range of partnerships which are helping to build leadership expertise in a number of areas; for example, the headteacher has the support and advice of a local leader of education and the deputy headteacher works well with a subject leader in education to develop mathematics throughout the school. Consultants are working with staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to support them in developing the environment.