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Mr C Stanley
Headteacher
Murdishaw West Community Primary School
Barnfield Avenue
Murdishaw
Runcorn
Cheshire
WA7 6EP

Dear Mr Stanley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Murdishaw West Community Primary School, Halton

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

My judgement is that 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 to:

- ensure, when implementing the action plan to improve teaching and learning in mathematics, sufficient focus is given to making improvements in Key Stage 1.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, five members of the Governing Body, nine pupils from Years 2 to 6, and a representative of the local authority. The school's improvement plans were evaluated. In addition, the inspector viewed a range of documentation, including that relating to the quality of teaching and learning, governance, attendance and pupils' progress.

Main findings

The outcome of the June 2013 inspection came as no surprise to the headteacher, governing body or local authority. This is testament to each party's accurate view of the strengths of the school and their clarity about what needs to be done to improve.

In June 2013 inspectors identified the following strengths. First, that the then new headteacher had introduced many changes and charted a clear path to ensure continuous school improvement. Second, that together with a new senior leadership team, governors and parents, the headteacher was beginning to drive forward improvements across the school, particularly in reading and at Key Stage 1. This confidence is well-placed and improvements evident already. For example, the proportion of pupils at the end of Year 2 attaining Level 2 in Reading, writing and mathematics is higher than in 2012. In addition, pupils spoken with reported a greater sense of enjoyment and challenge in their work. As a result of changes in the school's marking policy, pupils now have more opportunities to reflect on and respond to the comments their teachers and other adults have made about their work.

The headteacher has made clear to teachers the importance of reporting accurately what pupils can and cannot do so that when pupils move to their new class previous learning can be built on. Pupils' end of year reports in Summer 2013, for example, made clear to their parents what they had achieved during the 2012-13 academic year. These reports also set targets for the next year in English and mathematics. The inspector saw a good number of comments from parents appreciating this clarity. As a result of this clear steer, teachers have taken full responsibility for the accuracy of assessments they have made. In addition, senior leaders are now more involved in the checking of this accuracy, the setting of challenging targets and the progress pupils are making over time. It is they, rather than the headteacher alone, who will hold to account colleagues in each key stage for the performance of pupils.

Quite correctly, the headteacher has taken a determined stance on pupils' attendance. He has made clear to parents that when they take their child out of school, for holidays, in term time for example, this may lead to a fixed penalty notice. In addition, support has been sought from education welfare officers to assist with a few pupils who for whatever reason are absent regularly. Pupils spoken with understand well the importance of good attendance and that missing even a few days of school can interrupt their learning. They value greatly the incentives to have 100 per cent attendance, the promise of a pyjama party movie night for example.

Leaders' plans for improving the school are clear and focus in the main on the areas identified in the June 2013 inspection report. However, while the plan for mathematics is ambitious and challenging, it is not as strongly focused on improving outcomes in Key Stage 1 as is the plan for literacy. Plans to improve governance are moving at a pace. An external review of governance is to take place in late September in which governors will meet with the reviewer individually and collectively. Governors spoken with are preparing themselves well for this event and already identifying areas with which they need greater support and guidance.

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

Additional input from HMI

- Following the external review of governance in September 2013, HMI will contact the headteacher to ascertain the potential of any support and challenge to be offered.
- In early January 2014, following the December 2013 pupil progress meetings undertaken by senior leaders, HMI will work with the headteacher, senior leaders and local authority to ascertain the continued accuracy of assessments made.

External support

The school is drawing on external support and challenge well. In conjunction with the local authority an external review of governance has been commissioned, the accuracy of assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2013 has been assured, and a Local Leader of Education appointed to work with the school to help improve outcomes of pupils at the end of Key Stage 1. The local authority knows this school well.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Williams

Her Majesty's Inspector