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Mrs Jane Maloney
Headteacher
Millbrook Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Maloney

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Millbrook Community Primary School, Knowsley

Following my visit to your school on 18 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.

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

- keep the focus on learning and teaching rather than policy writing;
- give pupils more thinking and writing time when they work with teaching assistants;
- sharpen the action plan with measurable targets and clear accountability;
- ensure that governors attend meetings regularly.

Evidence

During the visit, I talked with you, other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I joined two lessons in Key Stage 2, met eight pupils in Year 6 and evaluated a sample of written work, and read governors' records since inspection.

Context

Since the inspection, a new deputy headteacher has joined the school. The senior team has made more time when they are not teaching, to lead and monitor improvements better.

Main findings

Since the last inspection, the school has improved a number of important areas, such as feedback to pupils to help them to improve their work, training for teachers resulting in better work in classrooms, accurate data so teachers can track the progress of pupils regularly, and better progress for children in their reading because they are taught letter sounds more effectively. Recent results at Key Stage 2 went up in most areas. Results in maths were especially pleasing because able children did a lot better than previous years. Results in reading did not improve, so well-focussed changes to teaching have been made.

The headteacher has led improvements strongly. Her prompt action was a key factor in ensuring that staff accepted the need to improve. She acted quickly before the summer break to set clear expectations about where improvements were needed in making and feedback to pupils. I saw a sample of twenty pieces of written work and asked older pupils to talk about their work in books. Pupils said teachers now explain how to do better. As a result, pupils understand and act on feedback. For younger children, examples of improvements included neater handwriting and more accurate spelling. Older pupils appreciate being given time to get on with their work. As one learner said: "Now teachers get to the point."

The new deputy headteacher brings a background in school improvement from other schools. Teachers now work in small groups to plan together. Six teachers are on an external course to improve teaching to outstanding. This training includes video recordings of each teacher's lessons to analyse individual strengths and weaknesses. From the lessons I joined and books seen, leaders' current evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning are accurate.

A computer-based system for tracking the progress of each pupil has been installed recently. The data system is already having good effects because teachers are using it to improve their planning of lessons, better suited to what children understand and can do, and the headteacher monitors progress more regularly.

Several months before the inspection, the school made changes to the way pupils are taught to read. Changes are now bearing fruit. Children are taught to understand sounds and letters (phonics) in a systematic way. Their progress is carefully monitored so the school spots if a child is falling behind. As a result, nearly all pupils have improved their reading skills.

In response to the inspection, governors decided that they would in future visit the school more often when children are at work and that they would become more familiar with data about the school's performance. However, attendance at meetings has not been good and so far governors have not been robust enough in tackling these key issues.

The school has an action plan in response to the inspection. In the plan, the sense of urgency is clear, in the early dates which the school has set itself to start and complete improvements. However, it is not clear which member of staff is responsible for each key action. Measures by which leaders monitor actions are too general, and do not make use of the good tracking data that senior leaders are using outside of the plan. Too many steps in the action plan are

about processes such as writing a policy, rather than those with direct impact on pupils' learning. The good progress which I saw at the school is not reflected in the action plan.

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 has drawn well on the support of the local collaborative of schools which has acted swiftly to give advice on the best courses for teachers at the school. From this term, a local authority school improvement adviser visits the school often. The local authority has put in place an external review of the governing body. However, governor training has not worked. The local authority buys in support for governors from an outside provider. Timings of courses do not suit people in work. On occasion, trainers did not turn up to deliver courses.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body.
- Local authority.