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26 September 2013

Mr Stuart Bennett
Headteacher
Thorp Primary School
Westerdale Drive
Royton
Oldham
Greater Manchester
OL2 5TY

Dear Mr Bennett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thorp Primary School, Oldham

Following my visit to your school on 25 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 this year. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- Improve the school's action plan to include measureable criteria at key points through the year to assess whether leaders' actions have been successful.
- Improve the actions within the plan and determine precisely which aspects of teaching need to be improved.

Evidence

I held meetings, during the visit, with you and the deputy headteacher, with three members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and information about what had been accomplished since the inspection.

Context

Since the inspection in June, the Chair of Governors resigned and a new Chair elected.

Main findings

Senior leaders did not wait for the inspection report to come out to start their work to become a good school. After the feedback by the inspectors at the final meeting, work started immediately. External consultants came into school to work with leaders to devise a strategy for improvement. This meant that leaders swiftly established a clear vision what improvements needed to be made and how they were going to achieve them.

Teachers have been trained in how to change good teaching in mathematics into outstanding teaching. The resources that teachers use in their lessons have improved and according to the headteacher's careful checking, the quality of activities that pupils are asked to complete has improved. There is increased challenge for the most-able pupils because of a greater amount of mathematical investigation and challenge. The headteacher's monitoring also notes that teachers have higher expectations of their pupils, partly because the targets teachers set for pupils to achieve by the end of the year have been raised. It is also partly because teachers have benefitted from training on how to teach higher level grammar, punctuation and spelling provided by staff from a local secondary academy.

Senior leaders have altered the timetable to give more time for pupils to respond to teachers' marking and to consider what they need to do to improve their work. The marking policy was rewritten before the summer holidays and is being applied consistently. The result of these quick actions, according to governors' monitoring, is that pupils have a better knowledge of their targets and what they need to do next to improve their work.

One of the areas for improvement identified by the June inspection was to improve the teaching and tracking of pupils who are supported by government money through the pupil premium. Pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and those who have parents and carers in the armed forces, are eligible for this money. The school took quick action to appoint a teacher to teach and support this group of pupils. Systems to track their attainment and their progress have improved and staff have a greater awareness of which pupils receive this additional funding. As a result the gap between this group and other pupils has been analysed but it is too early to see it is beginning to close.

Senior leaders organised an 'away day' for all governors to work on the school's action plan for improvement. The day had a number of benefits including governors' greater understanding of the actions that had to be taken to improve the school and a greater understanding of why the school was judged to require improvement. Governors are galvanised and determined to improve. They have started evaluating data about pupils' performance more frequently throughout the year and have started evaluating the attainment and progress of groups of pupils including boys, girls, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs.

There is an action plan in place which contains many positives features such as a list of sensible actions to improve; clear responsibilities for leading, monitoring and evaluating the success of the actions. The plan however needs to be re-written because the actions are too focused on procedures and do not get to the hub of what precisely needs to be improved within teaching and learning. The success of the school's actions is very difficult to measure because the criteria for measurement are too vague.

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

Governors have started working with a National Lead Governor and with the local authority's governor services. This has started to have a positive impact. Governors have an improved understanding of their roles and responsibilities and a better understanding of data about pupils' attainment and their progress.

Senior leaders have started working with a National Leader in Education and as a result they have a more focussed system of observing teaching and a clearer understanding of what needs to be done to improve the performance of the school.

An external mathematics consultant has worked with the staff to improve teaching. The training has worked and pupils are more engaged in lessons completing practical activities rather than completing low-level worksheets.

Systems to check on the performance of staff have been tightened as a result of input by personnel experts within the local authority.

The school has been teamed up with a national support school. As a result of the advice and support, leaders have grown more knowledgeable about what good teaching is like.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

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