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Mr James Randle
Headteacher
Chowbent Primary School
Laburnum Street
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Dear Mr Randle

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Chowbent Primary School, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 2013 with Mary Candlin Her Majesty's Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 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:

- strengthen the action plan with the inclusion of clear quantitative targets related to the aspects of teaching identified for improvement, particularly in the teaching of reading
- heighten the accountability of middle leaders for driving improvement through the compilation and implementation by them of action plans and regular evaluative reports to senior leaders and governors
- work with the local authority to moderate the assessment of the knowledge and skills of the children who have joined the Reception class
- ensure that time allowed for professional development and management aspects do not undermine the moves to ensure consistency and continuity of teaching for all pupils.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated and other documents reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and performance data from 2012/13.

Context

Two teachers have returned after absence and an experienced teacher has been appointed on a temporary contract. Two part-time teachers share the teaching of Year 1 pupils. Two higher level teaching assistants (HLTA) have been appointed to cover the maternity leave of two other HLTAs.

Main findings

Senior leaders and the governing body have been prompt in acting on the findings of the inspection in June. They have agreed a plan of action which reflects the identified areas for improvement and builds on work begun in 2012/13. While there is still a need to embed systems and practices, their positive impact was evident in the school's success in raising standards. 2013 saw the best results ever for Year 6 pupils. Senior leaders have a clear picture of what made a difference and also the factors that 'put the brakes' on improvement. They are determined to heighten consistency in teaching and to ensure adherence to agreed ways of working. The staged plan reflects this; it gives a clear outline of the action to be taken and expected outcomes. However, the outcomes related to the quality of teaching are linked more to pupils' achievement, for which there is a separate plan, and to curriculum delivery than to specified improvement in teaching skills and expertise.

The school is rightly continuing with practice that proved effective in 2012/13 including the setting of pupils by ability in English and mathematics, and the involvement of teaching support staff to lead group sessions. Two initiatives offer considerable promise in sharpening teachers' planning, raising their expectations of what pupils can do and maximising consistency in classroom practice; first, the introduction of steps in learning for each lesson, and second, the setting of targets for teachers and HLTAs. The progress in meeting these improvement targets is to be regularly monitored by the headteacher and will inform performance management.

Governance has strengthened. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body referred to the growth in commitment of staff and governors to ensure that the

school 'gets it right' and continues to improve. They are well aware of the need for middle managers to play a full part in driving improvement in the areas of responsibility for which they have volunteered or receive additional payment. Governors have undertaken training, reviewed key documents related to the school's performance and restructured committees to align their work with the action plan. Governors have also agreed extra meetings and rightly feature in the action plan as evaluators. The agreed attendance of nominated governors at the meetings of senior leaders is a valuable step in holding all leaders to account.

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 local authority has been supporting the school for some time on several fronts and intends to continue do so. It has provided additional funding and brokered links with a National Leader in Education to advise and share good practice. The resultant close links with an outstanding school have been beneficial in developing staff's awareness of effective teaching. Teachers have been working in groups of three to plan jointly, then deliver and reflect on their teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector