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Mrs Annette Williams
Acting Headteacher
St Chad's CofE Primary School
Gladstone Street
Winsford
Cheshire
CW7 4AT

Dear Mrs Williams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to St Chad's CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 October 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.

This was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- improve the quality of teaching and eradicate inadequate practice by:
 - ensuring teachers use information about pupils' starting point to identify the learning needs of all pupils in the class
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge so they can help pupils overcome gaps in their learning and make up lost ground rapidly
- review the quality of teaching for disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs so these pupils make better progress
- improve the effectiveness of the governing body so it makes a real difference to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement
- ensure effective transition in leadership so a new headteacher is able to hit the ground running and time is not lost on non-urgent priorities.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, senior leaders and managers, two members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action

taken since the last inspection. School data, including the unvalidated 2013 Key Stage 2 results, were evaluated and pupils' books were scrutinised. We observed seven lessons led by seven teachers. I also met with a small group of pupils to gather their views on the school's progress.

Context

There has been considerable change to the school's context since the inspection in November 2012. Following a period of absence the substantive headteacher left the school in the summer term. A temporary headteacher from another school took up post during this period of absence and stayed with the school until May. The local authority, in partnership with the governing body, secured an acting headteacher and associate deputy headteacher from another school to take over the leadership reins from this point in the year. This team has been in post for 11 working weeks. The governing body is in the process of recruiting a permanent headteacher to fill the leadership vacancy.

Throughout the year there were periods of prolonged teacher absence so that some classes were taught by supply teachers. Five teachers left the school at the end of the summer term and five new teachers took up post. The substantive deputy headteacher returned to school in September following a period of extended leave. The Year 3 teacher is absent. This class is being taught by a temporary teacher. The local authority has appointed three additional governors to the governing body.

Main findings

Everyone has been very busy since the previous inspection. There has been lots of activity to bring about change and help the school improve. Nonetheless, these actions have not made a big enough difference to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. There has been too much instability in staff. As a result you have to constantly backtrack to make sure everyone has the appropriate training and support to improve. This now raises serious concerns about the school's capacity to become good before its next inspection.

The 2013 unvalidated results show you have not been able to maintain and build on the improvements in 2012. Standards at the end of Year 6 have fallen and are below average. Pupils did not make enough progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. Typically, pupils entered the next phase of their schooling one year behind in their learning.

Underachievement by the end of Year 6 can be partly explained by the level of disruption this class experienced throughout the year. However, your own data show this is not a one-off incident. The achievement of pupils across the rest of the school is variable and does not paint a convincing picture of improvement. Too many pupils are making slow progress in gaining the skills and knowledge they need to become successful learners. As a result, many pupils are lagging behind and working below the levels expected for their age.

Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books show teaching is not strong enough to help pupils make up lost ground. There is some good teaching, but too much teaching on a day-to-day basis requires improvement or is inadequate. This is because teachers focus too much on what pupils will do during the lesson rather than what they will learn. Teachers do not have a secure understanding of pupils' different starting points. Gaps in teachers' subject knowledge mean not all teachers know the different steps pupils need to take to make rapid progress in lessons and over time. Teachers do not act quickly enough to help pupils who are struggling or to quickly guide pupils onto the next challenge when they have grasped new learning.

The teaching to help disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs make gains in their learning is not good enough. Teachers do not expect enough from these pupils. Some teachers rely too much on teaching assistants to support these pupils during lessons.

Despite slow progress since the previous inspection, there is evidence of some success across the school. The environment has been transformed; classrooms are bright, welcoming and organised to help pupils' learn. Pupils' books show presentation has improved and teachers' marking is much better than it was this time last year. Pupils are delighted with the changes you have made. Their increasing enthusiasm for school can be seen in their improving attendance.

You have only been in post for a short while but you are under no illusions about the school's shortcomings. It is clear you are working with urgency to halt the decline. You have built on the successful work of the previous acting headteacher to make sure essential systems are in place to help the school move forward. Nonetheless, the capacity of other leaders to continue this good work when you return to your own school is weak.

Members of the governing body have worked hard to improve their effectiveness. They have taken part in an external review of governance, forged stronger links with parents and carers and visit school more often. Nonetheless, their improved confidence has not made a difference to teaching or pupils' achievement and their view of the school's work is too optimistic.

External support

The local authority is rightly concerned about the school's slow progress. It has provided intensive support to help you and the governing body get on the right track. Nonetheless, this support and challenge has not had the desired effect because it has been thwarted by staff instability. Local authority officers are working in partnership with the Diocese to support the governing body in their quest to appoint a permanent headteacher in the near future.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cheshire West and Chester and the Director of the Diocese of Chester.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector