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Saroj Bell
Headteacher
Richard Wakefield Primary School
Burton Street
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Staffordshire
DE13 9NR

Dear Mrs Bell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Richard Wakefield Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 November 2013, 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. Please pass on my thanks to the members of the governing body, staff and parents who also gave of their time to contribute their views.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 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:

- diagnose exactly where there are weaknesses in the teaching of reading and phonics in Key Stage 1 and take action to address them, including if possible visiting a school where reading is taught particularly well
- stabilise and strengthen teaching overall in Years 1 and 2
- refine the action plan by making sure that it contains success criteria that map out the milestones that must be met along the way to being a good school.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and one of the assistant headteachers, three members of the Governing Body, a parent and a teaching assistant to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also spoke to a representative of the local authority on the telephone. The school's improvement plan was evaluated. I toured the school with you and visited every classroom.

Context

There have been some changes in staffing since the school was inspected. The situation is now relatively stable, but one further teacher is to leave at the end of this term. One class is currently taught by a supply teacher because the permanent teacher is ill. Pupils are no longer taught in mixed-age classes.

Main findings

You, the assistant headteacher and governors clearly believe that every pupil deserves a good education and you are all committed to taking swift action to make sure that this happens. You have high expectations of the quality of teaching both from teachers and teaching assistants. You are taking decisive action to deal with weaknesses. Your approach to bringing about improvement is appropriately balanced between support and guidance and tough messages where they are needed. The impact of actions taken is already showing, for example in better provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where the outdoor environment has been greatly enhanced. The new Reception class teacher has got off to a good start and the children appear settled and ready to learn.

You have worked with others to provide teachers and teaching assistants with many opportunities for training and professional development. This has included visits to other schools to observe good practice. Teachers are expected to adapt their practice in the light of what they have learned and observed, and you follow up to make sure this happens. This is resulting in a strengthening of the school's approaches to aspects of teaching and a sense of common purpose. Some staff have risen to the challenge and have improved a good deal as a result of the support and guidance that has been given, but it is clear that others are struggling with the raised expectations and closer scrutiny of the impact of their work on pupils' learning and progress.

Your monitoring, supported by that of the local authority, shows growing strengths in teaching, especially at Key Stage 2. This is enabling pupils to make faster progress but you are under no illusions that some still have a good deal of catching up to do.

The results of assessments carried out at the end of the summer term show that urgent action is needed to improve pupils' learning and progress across Key Stage 1 in all subjects and especially in reading. I suggested that you look at Ofsted's report *Reading by 6* that gives examples of good and outstanding practice in the teaching of reading. The recent report by the local authority gives a clear indication of some areas of weakness in the teaching of reading, phonics and writing and is a good starting point for further work.

The governing body is firmly behind the drive for improvement. Its members provide support and are heavily involved in monitoring the impact of actions. They are proactive in asking questions and seeking explanations, and are also mindful of the need to undertake further training where this may be needed.

The school's action plan was amended after you attended the 'getting to good' seminar in October. There is still scope to make more explicit what must be achieved in order for the school to be judged good, and the timescale within which this is expected. There is no need to spend a great deal of time updating the plan. It is clear that you and other leaders understand where there are weaknesses and exactly what needs to be done next.

I intend to revisit in the summer term 2014 to review with you the steps that have been taken to improve the teaching of reading.

External support

You and your staff have appreciated the high level of support that the local authority has provided. The support has had a positive impact, for example, in improving provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is clear that you are open and receptive to support. Your collaborative working with the Burton Co-operative Learning Trust and a local leader in education has also brought benefits, for example, in strengthening the accuracy of assessments.

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

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill
Her Majesty's Inspector