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Mr Paul Franklin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Franklin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Upton Primary School, Wakefield

Following my visit to your school on 15 November 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 September 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:

- review the school improvement plan; sharpening the criteria against which improvement is measured and articulating more clearly the improvements required in leadership, pupils' progress, and the quality of teaching in mathematics and in the Early Years Foundation Stage
- sharpen the targets in teachers' and leaders' performance management to clearly show how much improvement is expected and how teachers and leaders will be held accountable.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, two representatives from the local authority and held a telephone discussion with the Chair of the Governing Body. In these meetings we discussed the action taken since the last inspection. The school's improvement plans were evaluated. Documentation relating to monitoring activities, pupils' progress and teachers' appraisal were scrutinised and we conducted a tour of the school.

Context

Since the inspection the previous Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and a new Chair has been appointed.

Main findings

Leaders and governors fully accept the finding of the recent inspection. They were surprised by how much the school had declined compared to national expectations and, as one leader put it, 'the journey [to 'good'] will be much longer than we thought'.

The Governing Body have acted swiftly to appoint a new chair and to commission a review of their effectiveness. They are honest about the lack of scrutiny and challenge they previously gave the school and are clear this needs to improve. They have already begun to observe the work of leaders at first hand and to ensure robust challenge is given to the reports they receive on the quality of teaching. They are aware this needs to be developed systematically to ensure they are more informed about the school's work and are devising an annual planner to enable them to do this. Governors have attended training but more is required, particularly in relation to understanding the school's internal data, if they are to understand, and challenge, improvements in pupils' progress. Similarly they need to ensure they meet with senior leaders in the re-established standards committee if governors are to drill down into the impact of leaders' actions.

Senior leaders have implemented a new system of teaching writing which is leading to greater consistency in approaches particularly in Key Stage 1. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows this is beginning to have a positive impact but there are still some areas of weakness in the quality and effectiveness of teaching particularly in Key Stage 2. An appropriate range of monitoring activities has been planned but systems for ensuring accountability need strengthening. For example teachers' and leaders' performance management targets are too vague and do not set out clearly how much progress is expected and how they will be accountable for this.

The improvement plan drafted by the headteacher with other leaders identifies clearly all the aspects of improvement required by the recent inspection and contains some helpful milestones to measure progress throughout the year. However, the plan does not extend beyond the current academic year and the criteria against which leaders and governors can measure improvement are too vague. Some targets for improvement, for example those for outcomes at the end of Year 2, do not reflect enough challenge because they are not being considered in relation to national expectations given pupils' starting points. Assessment data used in the plan are not clear enough and do not enable governors to identify the amount of progress pupils are making particularly in relation to specific groups of pupils such as those who are supported by pupil premium funding or have special educational needs.

Some of the actions in the plan do not focus on how leaders will improve the quality of teaching particularly in relation to mathematics and the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is too great a focus on what resources will be put in place rather than the impact that needs to be seen. Similarly, although the plan details the actions governors will take, there is little detail about the accountability of leaders and what they will do to improve their effectiveness.

Her Majesty's Inspector will carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The support from the local authority has been effective in enabling the governing body review their effectiveness and begin to address the priorities identified accurately in the review. Similarly, support from the school improvement advisor has been incisive and is clear and honest about what the school needs to do to improve. The local authority has brokered the support of a Senior Leader of Education to support teaching in Year 6. The school has a number of partnerships with other schools which teachers have visited to gather ideas about how to improve their teaching. However, the extent to which this is guided and supported by the headteacher to ensure consistency of approach is underdeveloped.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Guy

Her Majesty's Inspector