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Ms Su Halliday
Headteacher
Meanwood Community Nursery and Primary School
Churchill Street
Rochdale
Lancashire
OL12 7DJ

Dear Ms Halliday

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Meanwood Community Nursery and Primary School, Rochdale

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. 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.

Having viewed the available evidence I am of the opinion that 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:

- Fine-tune the school development plan by including milestones so that senior leaders can check the progress being made against each of the school's improvement targets.
- Ensure that when leaders and managers observe lessons, they give greater attention to the impact that teaching is having on pupils' learning.
- Bring all marking in the school up to the quality of the best, providing pupils with clear information about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work.

Evidence

During my visit I met with you and the deputy headteacher, three members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority. I also took the opportunity to have a discussion with those teachers who have responsibility for coordinating Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and literacy across the school.

I also met with a group of energetic and articulate Year 6 pupils who were keen to talk about their experience of school and show me the work in their books.

You accompanied me on a tour of the school where we made a number of short visits to lessons. We observed pupils engaged in a range of activities including those designed to improve their literacy skills or develop their mathematical understanding. I scrutinised the school development plan and the local authority's support plan, written in response to the findings of the inspection. I analysed the school's data on pupils' achievement and examined senior leaders' records on the monitoring of teaching. I looked at the minutes of those governing body meetings that have taken place since the inspection and together we checked the work in a range of pupils' books. This activity enabled us to evaluate the quality of marking, how well work is matched to pupils' ability and the standard of pupils' writing.

Context

Since the most recent inspection the deputy headteacher has been appointed to the post of headteacher in another school and will be leaving Meanwood at the end of term. The governors have started the process of recruiting his replacement; in the interim you have restructured the senior leadership team to ensure his responsibilities are covered until an appointment is made. One of the teachers in lower Key Stage 2 is also leaving at the end of December and a replacement member of staff will be joining the school in January 2014.

Since the inspection the local authority have helped broker a link with a local successful school to support the improvements you and your colleagues are making.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection the test and teacher assessment results have been made available for 2013. The results of the Year 1 phonics test, which assesses pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters make, were below average. Consequently senior leaders have taken effective steps to improve teaching of this aspect of reading. Monitoring records show that the teaching of phonics is now consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Year 1. The school's most recent attainment data for phonics is indicating that pupils are currently on track to meet expectations at the end of this academic year.

As a result of senior leaders' drive to improve the quality of teaching, attainment in reading, writing and mathematics at Key Stage 1 improved last year. With results moving to broadly in line with the national average after being significantly below it in 2012. The gap in attainment between the boys and the girls closed and was not as wide as that found nationally. However, pupils entitled to free school meals did not attain as well as their peers in the school. Consequently the gap in attainment between the two groups was slightly more extensive than that found nation-wide.

Attainment at Key Stage 2 in mathematics, reading and writing has been on an upward trend for the past three years and moved to in line with the national average, in 2013. During this period reading showed the greatest improvement; with results improving at a faster rate than those found nationally. Similarly in mathematics the rate of improvement in attainment, from 2012 to 2013, was also greater than the national figure. With exception of writing, boys' attainment exceeded that of the girls', bucking the national trend.

At Key Stage 2 the gap in attainment between pupils entitled to free school meals and the other pupils in the school was narrower than that found nationally.

The results for the English grammar, spelling and punctuation test were disappointing. Your evaluation of the outcomes for this test has confirmed that pupils' spelling is an area for development. Consequently you have implemented a new scheme for the teaching of spelling with the expressed intention of improving pupils' skills in this area of literacy.

The school development plan is a comprehensive and detailed document setting out your plans for improving the school. Those responsible for each of the actions are identified and systems for monitoring and evaluating the plan, to assess its impact, are in place. However, there is a lack of milestones in the plan to enable senior leaders to assess the progress being made towards achieving each of the school improvement targets.

Concerns expressed about attendance in the inspection report are continuing to be addressed. The current rate of attendance is broadly average. However, pupils being taken on holiday during term time continue to depress the attendance figures and impacts negatively on their progress.

On our tour of the school we found pupils engaged and on task in all the lessons we visited; with no evidence of any disruptive behaviour. Pupils were friendly, well-mannered and courteous; willingly engaging in conversations with me to describe what they were doing. Accordingly the school presented itself as a place of purposeful learning.

Improvements in the quality of the teaching of writing with pupils demonstrating creativity is evidenced in pupils' books. These revealed that pupils' are given opportunities to write at length and there are good examples of pupils writing extensively in different subjects. For example descriptive writing in history and persuasive writing in literacy.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly; however the quality of marking is not of a consistently high standard. Where marking is comprehensive pupils are given clear information about what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Teachers then make sure that pupils follow up this advice, accelerating their progress. Weaker marking, however is less incisive with teachers' comments failing to capture key points for improvement. Consequently opportunities for pupils to learn from their mistakes are missed.

Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and there are systems in place for the sharing of good practice across the school. Consequently teachers are being held to account for the standard of their work in the classroom. However, monitoring records show that lesson observations place too much emphasis on what the teacher is doing and not enough on the impact that teaching is having on pupils' progress.

Governors accept that prior to the inspection they did not collect enough first hand evidence on the school's performance. They accept that they relied too heavily on information from third parties, such as the local authority.

As a result they were ill equipped to play their part in planning for the future or hold you and your colleagues to account for the standards achieved by the pupils. Since the inspection a member of the local authority school improvement team has carried out a review of governance. As a result governors have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In addition they have an action plan which is helping guide their work. However, it is too early to assess the impact that this plan is having on governor effectiveness.

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 quick to act on the findings of the inspection. The school's adviser has agreed a focused plan with senior leaders and governors, identifying the support the school will receive to help guide it on the road to good. The school's adviser is also providing effective support and guidance to governors; helping them develop their leadership skills. The local authority has brokered an effective link with a local successful school. This is enabling the staff of both schools to share their good practice and learn from each other about what works best in the classroom.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector