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20 November 2013

Miss Jenny Haunch
Headteacher
Washacre Primary School
Clough Avenue
Westhoughton
Bolton
Lancashire
BL5 2NJ

Dear Miss Haunch

Serious weaknesses monitoring inspection of Washacre Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 19 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and findings of the inspection. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged as having serious weaknesses following the section 5 inspection which took place in November 2012. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I recommend that the next inspection of Washacre Primary School be a full section 5 reinspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and the Director of Children's and Adults Services for Bolton.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching to be at least good or better throughout the school and so raise pupils' achievement and speed up their progress in reading, writing and mathematics by ensuring:
 - teachers do not talk for too long so that pupils keep their concentration and have more time to learn and think for themselves, and to complete work on their own
 - teachers use the accurate information that is now available about pupils' progress to plan challenging lessons for all abilities, especially the more able
 - teachers have the skills to support pupils effectively with their reading when they share books in small group sessions
 - pupils have more opportunities to develop and practise their writing skills in different subjects
 - pupils have more opportunities to use their mathematical skills to solve problems
 - pupils behave consistently well in lessons without needing regular reminders from staff.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the performance of different groups of pupils
 - ensuring, as a matter of urgency, that the interim executive board takes steps to appoint teachers with the necessary expertise to lead and manage different subjects.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 19 November 2013

Evidence

I met with you and the deputy headteacher and held telephone conversations with the senior school improvement officer for the local authority and the Chair of the IEB. I visited the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 2, 4 and 5/6 to observe teachers teach and spoke with these teachers after the observations. I spoke with a group of eight pupils from Key Stage 2. I looked at several documents, including your checks on the quality of teaching and summaries of other monitoring activities. I scrutinised pupils' progress information and looked at your improvement plan for 2013/2014. I also sampled some pupils' writing books from across the school.

Context

Since my last visit, a teacher has left the school and you have appointed a new teacher to join Year 2. You have also appointed a new teaching assistant to join Nursery.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

You, your staff and members of the IEB are resolute in your quest to ensure that pupils at Washacre receive the best possible education which prepares them for the future. Pupils are proud of the school and enthusiastic about the changes you have brought about; they say that they feel you are making the changes for their benefit. This new optimism is reflected in your recent survey of parents, in which all those who responded felt happy with their children's experiences at school. Your senior leadership team is now well established and members work effectively together to check systematically on the progress of the school. This means that you have competent and confident people in key roles that can help you to lead and manage the school as it makes progress on its journey out of serious weaknesses.

Systems for checking on the quality of teaching provide the drive for continued improvement. You and senior leaders check the quality of practice in the classrooms, look at pupils' workbooks and check pupils' progress information. By using all this information, you have a clear picture of the strengths of teaching within the school and the areas that need improvement. You have continued to use your best teachers to coach teachers who need help and those new to the school. Targets set for improvement are accompanied by a timeline and support, which more and more relates to in-house rather than external activities. You strictly follow up any targets to check that the desired improvement is achieved. Annual targets set for teachers are clearly linked to the quality of their teaching and the improvement of the achievement of the pupils they teach. Consequently, teachers are left in no doubt about their role in the improvement of the school.

Middle leaders are building their confidence in their specific roles as you give them chances to check pupils' books and visit classrooms. There is a leader for each subject and all have written action plans to guide their work in strengthening each subject. You recognise that for some teachers, this is at an early stage of development and they need more training to be able to work more effectively. Nevertheless, this is a step forward for the school and provides a secure base for moving forward.

Through regular meetings with you, members of the IEB are very effective in checking on the improvements in the school, especially those linked to the quality of teaching and thus pupils' achievement. Through the probing questions asked, you and your deputy headteacher are required to know what the school does well, the action taken to tackle any issues and to explain the effectiveness of planned action leading to whole-school success. Several teachers have presented information to the IEB explaining the progress pupils are making in their particular subject. The IEB has recognised the increased confidence and skills of you and your team in leading the school and quite rightly are allowing you to forge ahead. Members have retained a strong monitoring and evaluation role as they plan the future of governance in Washacre.

Strengths in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- Together with the IEB, you have established a permanent team of teachers, teaching assistants and other adults who are committed to raising the performance of Washacre for the benefit of the pupils. This demonstrates a huge improvement from the time of the previous inspection and acts as a firm foundation on which the school can grow.
- Systems for strictly checking on the quality of teaching are now part and parcel of the school's work and are thoroughly carried out with action taken if there are any weaknesses.
- Senior leaders have grown into their roles and middle leaders are developing their expertise. It would be helpful for middle leaders to use the Ofsted website to glean expert information about their subjects and to familiarise themselves with the expectations for each subject in the 2014 National Curriculum.
- Teachers set activities to match the needs and abilities of pupils; pupils say that, mostly, activities are 'just right', although a few pupils feel they could do harder work. Pupils want to work and make progress. Older pupils talked confidently about their 'levels' and feel they make good progress. All I spoke with felt that they have chances to write in different subjects and comment on the 'fun' activities they now enjoy. For example, one pupil enthusiastically explained about learning about shadows in science by going outside, which generated a discussion among the group about solid objects and the angle of the sun.
- Provisional results for the pupils who left Year 6 this year show a significant improvement on 2012 figures. Although pupils in this class made generally expected progress across Key Stage 2, they made much better progress across Year 6. Consequently, attainment improved so that pupils reached the average level in reading and almost 50% of pupils gained the higher Level 5. This is an improvement supported by the IEB's investment in better reading books. Pupils gained levels just below the average in mathematics and writing. You know that the development of writing still needs work. The steps taken to improve the delivery of mathematics and pupils' ability to solve problems are starting to pay dividends; again you know that pupils' confident recall of number facts needs to accelerate to enable them to solve problems quickly and efficiently.

- Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics show a pleasing uplift from 2012. Pupils in this class reached average levels in all subjects, with a distinct proportion of pupils gaining the higher Level 3. This provides a solid base from which to accelerate progress for this group of pupils as they move through Key Stage 2.

Weaknesses in the school's approaches to securing improvement:

- From the information you have collected on pupils' progress since September, it is evident that there is some variability. However, you have taken action to find out the causes for this unevenness and remedy the situation. This is a challenge as it is vital that pupils' progress continues to accelerate if the school is to achieve the success it wishes.
- You have a more accurate view of the performance of different groups of pupils and have recognised that there are still some gaps in attainment between different groups of pupils; namely those who need extra help to succeed, those who are more able and pupils with special educational needs. However, you have planned action to help these pupils through extra lessons or sessions to improve certain skills.
- The IEB has established a timeline for members to transfer eventually the governance of the school to its own governing body. It is essential that this is managed carefully so that the right governors are appointed to move the school forward.
- As stated at my last visit, pupils join the school at a variety of points during their school career. The school must make sure, when such pupils join, that they are given every chance to make good progress by checking their starting points from which progress can be tracked.

External support

Partnerships set up by the local authority have been built upon for the benefit of the school and evolved as the leadership has developed. As leadership has strengthened their skills, local authority officers have rightly taken a more strategic role to allow you to lead the school. Consultants have worked with the Early Years Foundation Stage to develop the learning areas. However, there is still room for some support to be given to this phase, especially in the understanding of children's progress information.