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Mrs Christine Pay
Teacher in Charge
Leicester City Primary PRU at the Phoenix Centre
Gervase Avenue
Thurnby Lodge Primary School
LE5 2EG

Dear Mrs Pay

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Leicester City Primary PRU at the Phoenix Centre

Following my visit to your PRU on 26 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.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the PRU was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and the management committee of the PRU are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The PRU should take further action to:

- improve the accuracy of assessments by building regular opportunities for teachers to moderate pupils' work across the two centres
- strengthen leadership by enabling senior teachers to take responsibility for leading improvements in literacy and numeracy across both centres.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the acting teacher in charge of the Phoenix Centre. I also met with three senior teachers from both sites, the Chair of the Management Committee and an adviser from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The PRU's improvement plan was evaluated.

The PRU's systems for tracking pupils' progress and samples of pupils' work from both sites were scrutinised.

Context

The PRU is a small school that is located on two sites, alongside two mainstream primary schools. The two sites are approximately six miles apart. Since the last section 5 inspection, two new teachers have been appointed to work in the Phoenix Centre. Three new teaching assistants have been appointed from September. One additional appointment has been made to the Management Committee.

Main findings

The PRU's leaders have taken prompt action to begin to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The teachers in charge of the two centres have worked with the local authority and members of the management committee to draw up a succinct action plan. This carefully identifies the actions they need to take in order to improve the quality of teaching and the impact that leaders have on the progress pupils make. However, the timescales by which leaders will check the plan's success are not always clear enough. Targets for the progress pupils should make over each term have been raised to be suitably challenging.

Leaders have quickly established a new system for tracking pupils' progress, and this has enabled them to summarise achievement in English and mathematics as well as in aspects of personal and social development. Leaders and staff all agree that this has removed a significant barrier to their understanding of where improvements need to be made to key areas of learning. From this, they have secured the support of a local authority consultant to work alongside staff to improve the teaching of writing. Assessment information is now more reliable, although leaders recognise that more needs to be done to build accurate moderation across the two centres.

Staffing is now more stable across the PRU, with permanent, experienced teaching staff in charge of all classes. Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, through direct observations and through the scrutiny of planning and pupils' work. Feedback to staff effectively focusses on each individual's areas for development. However, records show that sometimes feedback concentrates too much on what teachers are doing rather than on what pupils are learning. The performance management of all staff in the PRU now focuses more effectively on their impact on the progress that pupils make in their learning.

Teachers now use a common planning format across both centres. This is an improvement because it emphasises what pupils should learn rather than on the tasks they will complete in each lesson. Work in books shows that this is helping pupils develop their skills in writing and mathematics. Written feedback is helpful

and clearly explains to pupils what they need to do to improve, but they are not always given the time to respond to it.

An external review of the management committee has taken place. Since this, they have established new sub-committees, including one which focusses specifically on achievement and teaching. The committees are now better able to ask challenging questions because the quality of the information they have on pupils' progress has improved. Members can identify trends in the progress of pupils and are beginning to ask more searching questions about how the PRU utilises its pupil premium funding. They have worked with the local authority to ensure they are directly involved in the performance management of the teachers in charge of the two centres this year.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the PRU until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing effective support to the PRU. A literacy consultant has worked extensively with staff since the inspection, through staff training and shared teaching. An adviser has worked with senior teachers to develop their skills in coaching staff. The local authority has plans to monitor the school regularly between now and its next inspection. However, the length of time it takes to advertise externally for specialist staff is acting as a barrier to securing stability at the PRU and the long-term improvements that are needed.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Management Committee and the Director of Children's Services for Leicester local authority.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley
Her Majesty's Inspector