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Mrs Bernadette Worrall
Headteacher
St Catharine's CofE Primary School
Scholefield Lane
Scholes
Wigan
Lancashire
WN1 3LP

Dear Mrs Worrall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Catharine's CofE Primary School, Wigan

Following my visit to your school on 4 December 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:

- specify in the action plan exactly who will monitor and evaluate the action being taken, as well as when and how the monitoring and evaluation will be done
- compile separate plans or insert sections into the main action plan to show exactly how pupils' achievement in reading and writing will be raised
- agree a clear focus for visits to observe practice in effective schools and ensure swift application and evaluation of the implications for teaching and learning

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and the headteacher from another school who is acting on behalf of the local authority in monitoring the school's progress, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in September, two teachers have returned from maternity leave and share the teaching of a class of Year 1 pupils. A newly qualified teacher is responsible for the class of Year 3 pupils. The deputy headteacher has taken on the role of special educational needs coordinator.

Main findings

You and the deputy headteacher have built on the work started before the inspection in September to establish systems and structures to guide teaching and raise achievement. You and the governing body were aware of the areas for improvement and have actively sought advice and guidance from other headteachers and the local authority to resolve staffing issues and agree a programme of support. Having attended an Ofsted 'Getting to good' seminar you have amended and tightened the action plan. It outlines clearly the intended action to improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of leadership and management, the two areas for development given in the report in September. Actions have specific success criteria with targets for the quality of good teaching and for pupils' progress at key points such as April and July 2014. However, the plan does not reflect the actions you are taking and intend to take to raise achievement in writing and reading. Data from the 2013 tests and assessments show that pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 was well below average and that pupils' progress at Key Stage 2 was not enough to close the attainment gap, most especially in writing. Improvement in these areas must be seen as part of improving the quality of teaching and the quality of leadership and management.

Completed actions, such as agreeing a marking policy, have set the stage for developing greater consistency in the quality of teaching. This is rightly a key priority given the changes in staffing. You have ensured that all staff fully realise their accountability for pupils' progress. The half-termly reviews of pupils' progress are aptly focussing on how well different groups are doing, and whether expectations are high enough. Staff have already visited other schools and discussed the characteristics of good teaching. The deputy headteacher is taking a lead role in supporting and mentoring less experienced staff. The meeting during my visit, for example, highlighted the types of question to probe pupils' understanding and challenge their thinking. Links with schools within the consortium provide good opportunities to focus on particular aspects of practice, especially in relation to the teaching of reading and writing.

It has been agreed that governors on the curriculum committee will monitor the school's progress in relation to the action plan. The new format of your termly report to the governing body gives key information including details of how pupil premium funding is being spent. Along with key data from RAISE online, this term's report gives governors a clear overview of the school's current situation. The set of monitoring questions for governors, compiled by the local authority, is a timely tool to support the governing body in holding the school to account.

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 arranged for a headteacher to act on its behalf in monitoring the school's progress in following the action plan. She will act as a sounding board and assist in enabling links with other providers. It has also been agreed that the headteacher of an effective school within the local consortium of schools will work with you to develop the quality of leadership and management.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector