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Mrs Michelle Peck
Headteacher
Holme Slack Community Primary School
Manor House Lane
Preston
Lancashire
PR1 6HP

Dear Mrs Peck

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Holme Slack Community Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 13 December 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 school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in October 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- review the current improvement plan to ensure that it is firmly focused on specific actions which will directly improve teaching, classroom practice and outcomes for pupils
- ensure that monitoring is rigorous and is used to support improvement in teaching
- ensure that key policies, such as a reading policy, are in place and provide clear guidance on what is expected and that these policies are applied consistently across the school
- continue to apply the new behaviour strategies consistently across the school to ensure that behaviour is consistently good and well managed

- complete an audit of governors' skills to identify gaps in experience. There is a need to ensure that relevant training is provided for governors to enable them to be more confident in challenging school managers in the extent of progress the school is making towards improving outcomes for pupils. All governors should be required to play an active role in this process.
- improve the learning environment around the school. This could include making displays vibrant and reflective of the work of the school; making the library a place which pupils like to visit to select, read and enjoy books; providing reading corners in each classroom to raise the profile of reading around the school.

Evidence

During the visit meetings were held with the headteacher, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors as well as with a group of pupils from Year 6. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative from the local authority. The school's development plan was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with the headteacher focused on reading and literacy across the curriculum.

Context

There are no significant changes since the most recent inspection.

Main findings

The post-inspection action plan provides a broad framework for addressing the weaknesses identified by the recent inspection. The plan identifies actions which raise awareness of issues or audit provision but does not identify, in sufficient detail, specific do-able actions which will improve classroom practice or fast-track improvements. For example, auditing books and monitoring teaching may identify gaps in challenge for pupils in lessons and relative underachievement by more able pupils, but will not address the central issue of how to change this. Specific actions need to replace broad generalisations of 'improved teaching' for example. Some aspects, such as developing writing skills are linked to clear and specific actions, in this case 'Big Write' strategies but this is not the norm across the plan. The plan also lacks rigour in clearly identifying the type of external support needed to improve teachers' subject knowledge and classroom practice. For example, the phrase 'external inset as appropriate' is too vague and general. Equally, objectives to strengthen governance lack specificity. There is no audit of governors' skills to identify gaps in experience or whether they require training to ask challenging questions, for example. A broad statement linked to 'accessing governor services' is too vague.

Pupils have not noticed any change in the ways they are being taught, although they did indicate that new behaviour strategies are in place to lessen disruptive behaviour

in classrooms and corridors. Behaviour and teaching continue to be 'patchy' around the school. There is a lack of rigour and consistency in how reading is taught across the school. For example, some pupils read regularly, for others this does not happen. For some pupils it can be over six weeks before they change a book. Boys, in particular, appear loath to read. The school library is in disarray, is unwelcoming and does not encourage pupils to read. Classrooms do not have specific reading corners as a matter of good practice. Reading around the school is disorganised and there is no reading policy in place to identify minimum expectations. Some training and discussion has been provided on 'non-negotiables' to improve writing and this has resulted in a more consistent approach across classes to the teaching of writing. It is too early to judge the impact.

The learning environment in corridors and some classrooms is un-inviting. There is a general lack of care with displays, several of which have not been changed for some time, and resources are left lying around classrooms and clutter corridors.

Although there is a willingness to change, there is no sense of urgency or clear direction in how to improve provision. The school and governors are well intentioned but floundering to respond positively and quickly to the inspection findings. Not all governors are actively involved in fulfilling their responsibilities. A core group of governors are more active in school matters and do provide challenge to school leaders. This group is supportive but also recognises that, as a whole, governors require further development and training in various aspects of their work.

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

Local authority support has been light-touch and, to-date, has had little impact in ensuring that the school is responding quickly to the improvements required by the last inspection. The local authority has maintained a general monitoring presence but developmental work and advice has been very limited. There has been no brokerage of outside assistance, including links to a good school, which could provide additional support and advice on how to make improvements happen.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector