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20 January 2014

Mr Garry Crockett
Headteacher
Corinthian Community Primary School
Inigo Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L13 6SH

Dear Mr Crockett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Corinthian Community Primary School, Liverpool

Following my visit to your school on 17 January 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 October 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:

- review and streamline the current improvement plan to ensure that it is firmly focused on specific ways in which teaching and classroom practice can be improved
- ensure that monitoring of lessons and pupils' work is more frequent and rigorous and impacts on improvements in the classroom
- ensure that key policies, such as a reading or writing policy, are in place and provide clear guidance on what is expected from teachers and pupils and that these policies are applied consistently across the school
- develop middle leaders so that they can support teachers in developing their confidence and subject knowledge to enable them to deliver quality lessons which also enhance pupils' writing and communication skills
- complete an audit of governor skills to identify gaps in experience and knowledge in order to ensure that relevant and appropriate training can be provided. There is a need to empower governors to become more confident in challenging school leaders regarding the pace and progress the school is making in getting to good. All governors should be required to take an active part in this process.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself and your deputy, the Chair of the Governing body and two other governors as well as a group of pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with the local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. The school's development plan was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with yourself focused on reading and the consistency with which this was being applied across the school.

Context

There are no significant changes since the most recent inspection.

Main findings

The post-inspection action plan is too complex and, in its present form, too unwieldy to address fully, in a cohesive way, the three points for development identified during the inspection last October. Although some valid actions, which can lead to improvements in teaching, are identified, there is a danger that these will disappear and become marginalised among the plethora of proposed approaches. There is a need to streamline the plan and focus on simple but effective actions which will impact directly on, and support, learning in classrooms. For example, ensuring that as a matter of policy, pupils have access to and are expected to use dictionaries and thesauruses on a regular basis to improve spelling and widen vocabulary. Currently, the plan has too much emphasis on monitoring, which will identify and reinforce weaknesses rather than directly address them. A wide range of training is planned and, in some cases, has been started. This needs to be re-evaluated and refocused directly on the key issues or the impact will be dissipated and improvement will stall or be very slow.

Pupils who were interviewed were supportive and proud of the school. They recognised that some lessons continued to be disrupted, especially when supply staff were present. They had noticed that changes were being made to the way mathematics was being taught due to a clear calculation policy being applied, but they were less aware that anything else had changed for the better. They did identify that overall they felt that far too many of their lessons were not challenging enough.

There remain inconsistencies across the school in how certain key skills are taught. For example, there is a lack of rigour in how reading is taught and promoted. There is a need for clear reading and writing policies which ensure that pupils are not confused by different approaches as they move from class to class through the school. Regular monitoring needs to ensure that these are adhered to in a consistent way across the school and weak practice needs to be challenged and improved. There is a willingness amongst staff to change, but there is a danger that the complexity of the response will dilute impact in the classroom. For example, using links with partner schools abroad and the use of outdoor learning may provide

valuable experiences for pupils, but they need to be part of a learning journey that raises standards and pupils' achievement rather than providing an interesting interlude.

There have been some improvements, already put in place, which will have more impact in the longer term. A calculation policy for mathematics has been implemented and is commented on positively by pupils. Monitoring by senior leaders includes a wide range of approaches incorporating lesson observations alongside scrutiny of work and planning. This is clearly focused on direct impact in the classroom. However, middle leaders are generally less rigorous and tend to avoid challenging weaker practice or asking awkward questions. There is a clear need for training to develop middle leaders' skills to enable them to improve teaching and learning and manage their area of responsibility. Personalised support, including coaching, is being provided for teachers in Years 2 and 4 where weaker teaching was identified during the Ofsted inspection. As monitoring becomes more accurate and evaluative, individual and focused professional development can be provided across the whole school in order to secure improvements in teaching.

Governors recognise that, as a body, they require further development and training in various aspects of their work. They are supportive of the school and are keen to become more active in school matters to enable them to challenge school managers more convincingly. There is also a need for all governors to participate in this task as attendance at meetings is poor from a minority.

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

Prior to the inspection, the school was not considered to be 'at risk' and received light touch external support from the local authority. In response to the inspection outcomes, the local authority has initiated a 'Challenge Board' consisting of governors, local authority officers and school leaders to oversee the improvements that are needed. This group is due to meet shortly, for the first time, to challenge school leaders and identify the additional resources which might be needed to support improvements.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector