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Mrs Linda Speed
Acting Headteacher
Longton Lane Community Primary School
Longton Lane
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Merseyside
L35 8PB

Dear Mrs Speed

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Longton Lane Community Primary School, St. Helens

Following my visit to your school on 3 February 2014, 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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. The school should take immediate action to:

- further strengthen senior leadership to ensure that the acting headteacher has sufficient support to lead the school to good
- identify an outstanding school which can be used to model outstanding teaching to staff.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. We had a tour of the school and I sampled several lessons.

Context

The previous headteacher left the school at the end of the autumn term. You lead the school two and a half days per week and the deputy headteacher and two senior leaders cover the remaining part of the week. A new member has joined the governing body and the school is in the process of appointing two more governors.

Main findings

Since starting at Longton Lane earlier this term you have lost no time in making a full evaluation of the performance of the school and have a secure understanding of its strengths and areas to improve. You have strengthened the school improvement plan so that it is linked more closely to how each action will improve practice in the classroom and pupils' achievement. You acknowledge that there is still some work to be done to ensure the plan reflects the speed at which the school needs to improve. Each action is linked with the person leading it and a timescale sets out when the action should be achieved. You have observed all teachers teach and introduced support and challenge where it is needed in order to improve practice quickly. You have taken over the responsibility for the performance management of all teachers and you plan to start this process as soon as possible. Although systems for checking on pupils' progress and the quality of teaching had been introduced prior to your arrival, you have started to gather this information more concisely so it can be used better for monitoring and evaluating and to inform further action. You have reviewed school organisation so that key meetings of senior leaders are held at more appropriate times and you are guiding senior leaders as they get used to more responsibility for the aspects they lead. In this way you have set a more strategic approach to leadership and have emphasised the need for accountability.

All staff have visited your own school to see how the teaching areas can be organised. Consequently, you and staff have cleared teaching spaces throughout the school so that pupils and staff can more easily access the resources available and navigate around the classrooms. As a result, staff know what aids are available to them to support their practice and you have secured the governors' support in purchasing resources to supplement any gaps, for example new reading books.

With the support of the local authority you have checked on the accuracy of assessment levels for all pupils in reading, writing and mathematics which has led to a more secure knowledge of pupil progress information. This was necessary in order to have a secure baseline from which to plot progress. You consider that the February assessments will give you an even more robust baseline.

The governing body has taken some hard decisions in their quest to improve the school. Through a variety of activities they are now finding out about the school for themselves rather than rely on the information given by leadership. This is helping them to support and challenge the school more effectively. The plan to use the 'governor mark' to improve their skills has slipped but the Chair of Governors has attended training with a view to taking this forward. With the appointment of two new governors, it is timely for the governors to consider an external review so that all members are clear about their roles and responsibilities and to create an action plan for improvement.

Despite your perceptive and determined approach the improvement of the school rests solely on your skills and knowledge in a part time capacity. It would be beneficial for the

local authority and the governing body to consider how best they can support your leadership so that the school can progress to good more swiftly. Nevertheless, although it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the actions you have taken, you have set the scene for the school to make better progress.

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 organised for you to support the school on a part-time basis. A local authority English adviser has worked with the school's English leader to secure the assessments for pupils in reading and writing. He has led training on the teaching of grammar and continues to support the school. The local authority organised a link with the local teaching school in order to support the school in mathematics. The local authority linked officer visits regularly and a review is planned for the end of this term.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Her Majesty's Inspector