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Mrs Alison Evans
Headteacher
Woodslee Primary School
Croft Avenue
Bromborough
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Merseyside
CH62 2BP

Dear Mrs Evans

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodslee Primary School, Wirral

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 January 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:

- tackle the minority of teaching which is not yet good enough on a day-to-day basis
- take greater account of pupil voice so you can use their sensible views to help shape further improvement.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself and the senior leadership team, six members of the governing body and a local authority officer to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books. We also watched five lessons led by five teachers. I met with a small group of older pupils to find out their views about the changes you have made since the last inspection. School data, including the

unvalidated 2013 results, were scrutinised. I also considered your checks on teaching and your school improvement plan.

Context

There have been considerable changes since the school was inspected in January 2013. Two teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. A new deputy headteacher and a temporary Year 5 teacher took up post in September. Over half of the teaching staff have been absent, either short or long term at some point since the inspectors last visited your school. Some teachers have had more than one incident of absence. As a result, many classes have been taught by temporary teachers for varying periods of time. At the time of my visit, two teachers had returned to their post following a period of absence and four teachers were absent.

Main findings

You are taking the correct action to bring about improvement. You have not shirked difficult decisions or challenging conversations. Despite this, your journey since the previous inspection has not been smooth or easy. Progress has faltered along the way and you have not always been able to bring about change as quickly as you intended to ensure the school is judged good at the next inspection. The biggest barrier to your success continues to be staff absence. Over half of the teaching staff have been absent at some point during the year; many have had, or continue to have, long spells away from their classrooms. Although you are successful in securing temporary teachers, this continual fire-fighting has sometimes pulled you away from the core business of improving teaching and raising pupils' achievement. This is because you have to set the standard for temporary teachers and check they are following your high expectations while helping teachers who have been absent quickly make-up for lost time.

This situation was a cause for concern for everyone at the end of the last academic year. Your own data predicted a fall in standards at the end of Year 6. Your action to help these pupils catch-up for weaker teaching in the past made some difference in plugging gaps in learning. However, there was not enough time from when the inspectors left the school in January to the point at which pupils sat their tests to prevent a fall in standards at the end of Key Stage 2.

Despite these shortcomings, you are turning the situation around; the pace of change since the new academic year is marked and there are clear signs of success in improving teaching. You have been able to act with greater urgency because you are being supported by a much stronger leadership team who share your goals and are backing your decisions all the way. As a result, the responsibility for improvement is no longer resting too heavily on your shoulders. Senior leaders know what they need to do; they have the skills and the proven expertise in the classroom to help staff refresh their teaching techniques.

Your work to improve the quality of teaching is making a difference in most areas of the school with permanent and temporary staff. Pupils' books, your own monitoring

evidence and some of the lessons we visited show teaching is much stronger on a day-to-day basis than it was on my last visit. Some teachers are flying because they are seizing training opportunities and your guidance to help them raise their game.

Teaching in Reception is going from strength-to-strength; the children and adults in this area of the school are bubbling with excitement as each day is an opportunity to explore new ways of teaching and learning. Older pupils are benefitting from stronger teaching which is helping to make up for past weaknesses, by developing their creativity, independence and perseverance. A love of learning is gradually being fostered. This is reflected in lively and bright classrooms which celebrate pupils' efforts and spur them on to work harder. This improving picture means pupils are making better progress; the current Year 6 are working at the levels expected for their age and more are on track to make better than expected progress by the time they leave the school. However, not all teachers are keeping pace and there is more to do to ensure all pupils benefit from stronger teaching each time they cross the classroom threshold.

Your checks on teaching are becoming much sharper because you are linking what you see in the classroom with information from pupils' books. This means you know what teaching is typically like on a daily basis. You are aware where teaching is strong and you are ensuring extra support and checks are in place for those teachers who still have some distance to travel.

Pupils are bubbly and articulate. They say the school is improving. They feel learning is more fun and they are having greater opportunities to do a wider range of activities and not just English and mathematics. They think their learning could be even better if homework was better matched to what they learn in class and they get more time in lessons to get on with the exciting tasks teachers set. Some pupils feel behaviour is not as good as it could be on the playground and they point to some hurtful name-calling. You recognise there is a need to take greater account of pupil voice so you can use their sensible views to help shape further improvement.

Although the governing body were slow to organise the external review of governance, this has now taken place and has helped them grasp their roles and responsibilities. Their work to understand school data is paying dividends. They are increasingly confident in asking the right questions. They know that some areas of the school are not moving as quickly as they want and they have a very realistic understanding of what needs to happen next to tackle remaining weaknesses. They have taken some decisive action. For example, they appointed an external firm of employment experts to support you in tackling staff absence and other issues which hinder 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 support of the local authority is effective. It has had a positive influence in almost all areas of the school. Local authority officers have provided training for governors and continue to attend governor meeting so they are at hand with guidance and advice. Officers have worked closely with you to ensure your checks on teaching are accurate. They have also provided whole-school and individual training to help teachers improve their skills. You have also been given priority access to local authority projects which are making a difference in school. For example, the Reception teacher is full of praise for the Early Years Foundation Stage project she is involved in. The local authority is pleased with your progress and is signalling its confidence in your ability to bring about change by reducing the intensity of support and challenge. Nonetheless, they remain close at hand to make sure you can access appropriate support in a timely manner.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector