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5 March 2014

Mrs Sarah Holland
Headteacher
Lovers Lane Primary and Nursery School
Warburton Street
Newark
NG24 1LT

Dear Mrs Holland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lovers Lane Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 4 March 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in December 2012. 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:

- ensure that senior leaders maintain the school's improvement, by prioritising the future actions to be taken to improve the school more efficiently and effectively
- ensure that you, as the headteacher, communicate more effectively with staff to ensure that staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities, and to raise staff morale.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, and separately with your deputy headteacher and other leaders. I also met with two representatives of the governing body, including the Chair, and with a representative working on behalf of the local authority. We visited each class for a short period of time to look at work in pupils' books together. I also looked at a number of documents, including minutes from

governing body meetings and the school's information about pupils' progress and standards.

Context

Since the last monitoring visit, in April 2013, you returned to the school in the autumn term 2013, following a period of illness. A new Chair of the Governing Body has recently been elected.

Main findings

Work in pupils' books, drop-ins to classes and the school's records of teachers' work indicate that the quality of teaching is improving. Appropriate actions are being taken by leaders to tackle the small remainder of teaching which is still less than good. As a result, pupils are making better progress than they did previously. However, several pupils in Year 6, despite making strong progress this year, are still making up for their previous underachievement in developing reading skills. Pupils across the school, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are being given more frequent opportunities to develop their writing skills. This, when combined with improving teaching quality, is leading to greatly improved writing standards across the school.

Leaders have been effective in implementing successful strategies to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils' attendance in the Autumn term 2013 was much improved on their attendance during the same period in 2012.

A review of governance has taken place and this has helped to ensure that governors now have a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Governors have also received appropriate training to help develop their skills in analysing data about pupils' progress. The new Chair of the Governing Body has got off to a strong start, and has outlined his raised expectations of the contributions that he expects governors to make to the school. An increased number of governors are now engaging in activities to check on the school's performance. However, governors still do not offer as much challenge to leaders as they could do, and understand that they still need to improve their work in this area.

Despite the school taking effective actions to improve since the last inspection, there are signs that the pace of change and improvement is beginning to slow down. This is because, more recently, leaders have not always ensured that the advice they receive and buy into from others, including from a local teaching partnership, translates into manageable and well understood actions for staff to take. Consequently, teachers say that they are receiving a lack of clarity and direction from you, as the headteacher. As a result, teachers report that staff morale is currently very low. This causes me some concerns, and I will return to the school in the summer term 2014 to gauge the progress made in dealing with this issue.

External support

The local authority has provided effective support to senior leaders which has primarily focused on strategies to help leaders to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, and tackle any underperformance. Support from other strategic partners has begun more recently, and it is difficult to fully assess the impact of this at such an early stage. However, staff are not responding positively to some of the new systems that are being implemented in the school as a result of these partnerships, and believe that the progress of the school is being slowed as a result.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, and the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire local authority.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Spencer
Her Majesty's Inspector