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Mrs Maureen Curley
Headteacher
St Mary's CE Primary School
St Mary's Road
Moston
Manchester M40 0DF

Dear Mrs Curley

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's CE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 12 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 your help and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the 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 January 2014. This visit was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

You and the 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:

- sharpen the action plan, and any additional plans to improve achievement in reading and writing, by specifying the expected outcomes for pupils, clarifying who will be responsible for each action and who will evaluate the effectiveness of action taken
- work with the local authority and/or other schools to secure the accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment and progress, especially in reading and writing
- identify a focus for visits and for meetings with staff from other schools to ensure a 'clear line of sight' to actions in the action plan.

Evidence

During the visit, I held a meeting with you, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the local authority. We discussed the current situation and action taken to date. The action plan was evaluated.

Context

Temporary staff are working with the Nursery and Reception class in the absence of the class teachers. A part-time teacher is working with pupils in Years 1 and 2 to promote reading progress. Two new governors have been appointed. You have announced your retirement from the end of the summer term and the governing body has advertised your post.

Main findings

The governing body, you and the staff accept that the school requires improvement. You had already recognised that pupils' progress, particularly in reading and writing, could be better and had initiated some changes in the term before the inspection. For example, to develop consistency and progression in learning, all classes now have a daily session focussed on spelling, grammar and punctuation. Similarly, teachers are giving pupils more opportunities to write.

You have shared the draft action plan with other senior managers and the local authority but it has yet to be seen by the governing body. You have broken down the two areas for improvement, identified in the inspection in January, into a series of further actions. However, the plan lacks sharpness of intent and expected outcome. It does not specify who will be responsible for each action or who will evaluate the impact and when. Although there is reference to the governing body checking that actions are taking place, the plan does not show how the governing body will take a lead role in evaluating the impact of actions. Steps to carry out the required review of governance have been agreed but the action plan has no mention of action to raise the effectiveness of governance.

You and the staff are looking to ways to develop pupils' engagement in reading and writing. The recent celebration of World Book Day saw pupils dressing as characters and talking about favourite books. Staff are visiting other schools and sharing ideas about how to involve pupils in literacy. However, it is important that all visits have a clearly defined focus and explicit link with the action plan.

A key step forward has been the clarification with teaching staff of the expectations of their role in relation to the Teachers' Standards and current pay and conditions. This has ensured all are aware of first, their accountability for pupils' progress, second, the expectation that pupils will make better than nationally expected

progress if teaching is good, and that third, those with posts of responsibility will be held to account for their part in driving improvement.

You have been refining the presentation of data to give overviews of the proportions of pupils in each year group, and in differing groups, who are making expected and more than expected progress. The data from the autumn term threw up some anomalies and your decision to now hold meetings with staff about pupils' progress each half term is a valuable move to increase accountability and to evaluate the impact of provision in reading and writing. It is vital that the assessment of pupils' attainment is accurate and that all staff have a clear picture of typical performance for each sub-level, especially in reading and writing. Given the links with other schools, it is timely for you and the literacy leader to work with others to moderate judgements and establish a secure baseline of attainment.

The governing body has met with a national leader of governance who will lead the review and will work with governors once a plan of action has been agreed.

External support

The local authority has been prompt to broker and finance support from an outstanding local primary school. The Executive Headteacher has visited St Mary's and you have discussed possible ways to work together to drive improvement and develop the leadership expertise of key staff. The local authority also commissioned an external consultant to lead the session with staff on performance management. It intends to continue the practice of termly visits by a representative to quality assure the school's practice and performance.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen
Her Majesty's Inspector