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Mrs Victoria Bould
Headteacher
Poulton-le-Sands Church of England Primary School
Church Street
Morecambe
Lancashire, LA4 5QA.

Dear Mrs Bould

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Poulton-le-Sands Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 27 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 January 2014. 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 inspection.

The school should take further action to:

- improve standards of writing across subjects in Key Stage 2, including basic presentation, handwriting, variety of style and purpose, and sustained writing
- on the learning environment, check that work on display is accurate; turn advice about writing put on walls into learning mats so each pupil sees advice while working
- enable middle leaders to take a fuller part in whole school monitoring, and to see established practice in good or outstanding schools and in the local cluster
- enable governors to see established good practice in other schools, with regard to monitoring and evaluation
- ensure that senior leaders link the action plan more clearly to pupils' progress by including measureable starting points and targets for different groups
- ensure that governors include in the plan early actions on the pupil premium grant, as the external review has not yet taken place and several months have passed.

Evidence

During the visit I met you, two middle leaders, four members of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss action since the last inspection. I evaluated your post-inspection action plan, feedback from parents, information on free school meals, attendance and the behaviour log. Jointly, we visited four classrooms on a learning walk and observed behaviour in the playground. We talked with pupils about recent changes and sampled work in English and topics. I heard pupils reading in Years 3 and 5.

Main findings

You summed up the story of your school as pupils' needs changing, expectations rising but the school not responding fast enough. Low results in 2013 made this clear. You and governors asked for help from the local authority, so steps towards improvement began before the inspection and findings were readily accepted by governors and the staff. Through the day, adults and children said that people 'work as a team'. A challenge will be to keep a family spirit while putting in place more robust approaches to improvement that are well-established in many school.

A number of helpful steps have already been taken. Training and support has improved teachers' confidence in mathematics. More frequent assessment of progress in reading, writing and mathematics and progress meetings with each teacher is helping to spot which children need to improve more quickly. A wider range of evidence is now gathered about standards of work over time. The behaviour for learning system is in place in every class. Middle leaders have begun to update their practice and to gain a whole school view.

'Behaviour for learning' is working well. Every pupil I talked to knew about the rules and rewards. Children in both key stages could give examples of how they had persevered with work, listened better, or concentrated more in class. Some older children could show examples of improvements to their work. Pupils talked openly about behaviour problems in the playground but were clear that this had improved recently.

School information shows that children's progress in mathematics has started to improve. Gaps are closing between children entitled to free school meals and others. Targets are ambitious, rightly so. The children I heard read with enjoyment, most with fluency and expression. All knew how to use phonic and context clues to tackle words or phrases that were unfamiliar. However, standards in writing are too low. Work is poorly presented, especially in 'topic' books for subjects other than English and mathematics. Some handwriting was not legible, even for older children. There was not enough variety of kinds of writing. The purpose of much work was unclear in terms of subjects.

Your action plan is strong on monitoring. There is a good range of evidence used to check progress, including scrutiny of pupils' work and meetings with pupils. Some actions tackle the underlying issues well, such as coaching in classroom skills. A lead person is named for each strand of activities. However, outcomes vary. Some hit the mark but others are too general. Outcomes should be measurable. The central purpose the action plan is more rapid progress for children, so outcomes should relate to that.

Several months have gone by since the inspection and it has not been possible to find a suitable provider for the fairly new area of work to review use of the pupil premium. Governors have taken decisive action, such as employing a learning mentor to work with pupils and families where needed. These steps should be included in the action plan.

The impact of governors can be seen in their decisions about staffing, employing a learning mentor which has helped to improve attendance and behaviour of more vulnerable children, releasing the headteacher to carry out self-evaluation in school, and asking for local authority support. Key governors have taken part in training to understand performance data. However, governors would benefit from seeing how other governors in good and outstanding schools now discharge their roles.

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 support has worked well in starting to improve standards in mathematics by work alongside teachers and by providing resources for them. The work of advisers has increased the confidence of senior leaders in working with data. Training and support for behaviour for learning was provided by a consultant. It has had a major impact on the working environment in classrooms and at playtime. There has been little impact from support on standards of writing as yet. Your school also works with a leading headteacher from another local school. Four teachers have observed lessons there in the last few days, so it is too early to assess impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey
Her Majesty's Inspector