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Mr Stan Jackson
Headteacher
Scarborough, Northstead Community Primary School
Maple Drive
Scarborough
North Yorkshire
YO12 6LP

Dear Mr Jackson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Scarborough, Northstead Community Primary School, North Yorkshire

Following my visit to your school on 24 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 section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that reports about the current quality of teaching reflect what it is typically like 'day-to-day' rather than how teachers perform in a one-off, planned lesson observation
- ensure a consistent approach to the assessment of reading so that all teachers can set appropriate and consistent targets to address gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills
- refine the school development plan to include ambitious targets, broken down into steps across the year, for every year group.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I reviewed a range of documentation including recent pupil progress information, the checks made on the quality of teaching and the school improvement plan. You also accompanied me on a learning walk to the majority of classes alongside the deputy headteacher.

Context

Two members of staff are due to leave at the end of the spring term. An inclusion manager and an additional deputy headteacher have recently been appointed to take up post in April and June respectively.

Main findings

You have quickly realised that the key to becoming good or better within 24 months is to rapidly improve the quality of teaching. To this end, you have implemented a package of 'non-negotiables' and prioritised a programme of training so that staff are clear about what is expected of them and, importantly, receive the support they require to eradicate the inconsistencies in practice identified in the January inspection. Your proactive approach in forging links with a number of good or better schools in order to learn from best practice has secured the commitment of staff who have enjoyed gaining a fresh perspective on how they might improve further.

Working with the deputy headteacher, you have introduced a more robust approach to checking on the quality of teaching. You now make judgements based on what a teacher is typically like, day-to-day, as seen through the work in pupils' books and more frequent 'drop-in' to lessons, rather than relying on a single, snapshot lesson observation. Staff are beginning to understand this broader approach to how they are held to account but some mixed messages and uncertainty remain. For example, while you acknowledge that judgements about teaching are reached through cross-referencing a range of information, your school development plan and reports to staff and governors present only a summary of the teaching observed in one-off, planned lesson observations. This risks giving too rosy a view of where teaching currently sits and does not communicate accurately how far teaching still has to go for pupil progress to reach your ambitious targets.

Actions to improve reading, started before the recent inspection, continue to embed into daily practice so that there is an increasingly consistent approach to the teaching of phonics. Recent data already shows that pupils are responding well to this more structured approach with many mastering new skills quickly and moving to more challenging levels of work. Pupils themselves are knowledgeable of their targets in writing and mathematics with older pupils in particular, showing ambition to achieve well. This understanding is not replicated in reading because a systematic approach to setting targets in this area of English is yet to be addressed. Middle leaders have rightly recognised that this is hindered by a lack of consistency in how teachers currently assess pupils' reading skills.

Governance continues to strengthen. The pupil progress committee, started before the inspection, has become sharper-edged as its members have become increasingly more confident in analysing the summaries of pupil progress now being provided to them. While governors are aware of where you expect pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 to be by the end of the year, they are less clear about whether pupils in other year groups are on track. This is because school documentation is not as clear as it could be in detailing where all pupils should be at given points throughout the year. Improvements in the presentation of progress data for other year groups would better enable governors to ask the right questions about the impact of improvement initiatives across all year groups.

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 has increased its level of challenge which you acknowledge is making senior leaders reflect more readily on their approaches to school improvement. Well-targeted support for English, mathematics and vulnerable learners has been delivered or is planned to take place soon. This training compliments the work already underway with good or better partner schools you have sought out for yourself. In particular, your links with a National Leader of Education from New York Primary School in North Tyneside is proving fertile for leaders, teachers and governors to observe, share and develop features of effective practice. This is opening the eyes of staff to what it is possible to achieve even with the most disadvantaged pupils.

You are keen to attend an Ofsted '*getting to good*' seminar alongside some of your leadership team. This is in the process of being arranged for the summer term.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston

Her Majesty's Inspector