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Ms Sarah Midgley/Mrs Julie Martin
Headteacher
Park Primary School
Rutland Street
Colne
Lancashire
BB8 0QJ

Dear Ms Midgley/Mrs Julie Martin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Park Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 31 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 not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure the governing body follows the recommendations set out in the review of governance
- tighten procedures so that the governing body manages the performance of staff more effectively
- rewrite the action plan so that it presents a more coherent and substantial set of actions that will have a rapid impact on improving children's progress
- build further on recent improvements at leadership level
- ensure all teaching staff support the drive to move the school forward by co-operating with school leaders and following reasonable management instruction.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the acting deputy headteacher, pupils, the governing body and representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also considered documentation on pupils' current progress, scrutinised pupils' work, examined the report from the review of

governance that had been undertaken, visited several classrooms, attended an assembly and talked informally to a number of pupils during lunch time.

Context

This school has had two headteachers since 2012. Since the previous inspection, the substantive headteacher has resigned and governors are preparing to make a new appointment to this post with effect from next term. The acting headteacher, who was in post at the time of the inspection, has gone on maternity leave and an associate headteacher, who is headteacher of another local school, has been supporting the school since February half term.

Main findings

The many changes at leadership level have left this school floundering like a rudderless ship; as a result, little effective action has been taken to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The associate headteacher, ably supported by the acting deputy headteacher, has set in motion many appropriate and well-targeted initiatives, thereby providing a much needed clear line of sight in moving forward. However, as such actions are at the very early stages of development, there is as yet little compelling evidence of impact.

The comprehensive review of the governing body has revealed many weaknesses at the heart of governance. Governors are well-intentioned and have supported the school for many years. However, they have struggled to adapt to the increased responsibilities of governance and lead the school effectively, particularly given the many changes at headship level. Governors are not sufficiently well-informed; furthermore, they lack the confidence required to hold the school to account. As a result, underperformance has been left unchallenged, leading to pupils' continued underachievement.

The action plan that has been drawn up since the inspection is insufficiently detailed in terms of specific, measurable success criteria; therefore it does not serve as a useful tool for checking how well the school is doing in tackling the weaknesses identified at the inspection. Targets for improvement are too vague and simplistic and timescales are too generous. A particular weakness is that the plan is not directed at whole-school improvement, neglecting mathematics and other subjects and concentrating solely on raising standards in writing. This action plan in no way constitutes a viable road map to drive the school forward to becoming a good school quickly.

Procedures to check up on the quality of teachers' work have been tightened. Teachers are now held responsible for the progress of pupils in their classes and they are required to make sure swift action is taken to prevent pupils falling behind. In this way, the associate headteacher has created a much sharper culture of accountability that has started to raise expectations.

Weaknesses at leadership level have had a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching. Teachers have found it difficult to respond positively in the past to the conflicting advice they have been given by a succession of headteachers. They have welcomed the new sense of direction provided by the associate headteacher; however, some teachers are still standing in the way of supporting her in moving the school forward, for example by refusing to comply with reasonable management requests.

Pupils in KS1 have historically made good progress and this continues to be the case. In addition, there are some signs of improvement in Years 3, 4 and 5. However, the school frankly admits that the current performance of pupils in Year 6 is disappointing. This is attributed to a legacy of poor teaching and a dependence upon temporary teachers in the past. Nevertheless, this means that the school is yet again on course for a set of results in the forthcoming SATs that indicate standards at the end of KS2 remain far too low.

Although pupils said that behaviour has improved this term, inconsistent approaches to the management of poor behaviour in the past continue to have a very negative impact. During my visits to classrooms, although most pupils seemed keen to learn, others were yawning and fidgeting, utterly bored by the lesson. My conversations with pupils over lunch were frequently interrupted by children running up to me, complaining about another pupil's poor behaviour. On the other hand, pupils' behaviour during an imaginative assembly conducted by the associate headteacher was impeccable. All pupils enthusiastically sang along while a group of pupils at the front did a sign language version of a popular song. This was clear evidence of the fact that the pupils of Park Primary know perfectly well how to behave, but because they have become used to poor behaviour going unchallenged, some pupils still feel they can get away with it.

The engaging, articulate and friendly pupils I met with during my visit were wholeheartedly supportive and proud of their school. They are ambitious to do well, enjoy reading and consider their education to be highly important. It was a heart-warming experience to meet with such shining examples of the youth of today; the pupils of Park Primary deserve a good school with leaders prepared to tackle with urgency, persistence and vigour the stumbling blocks standing in the way of their future.

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 provided intensive support to the school for some time, including brokering the support of the associate headteacher. The local authority's review of governance is extremely thorough and its recommendations for improvement are clear, precise and appropriate. Training has been provided for teachers in behaviour management and to improve the quality of teaching. There is some limited evidence to show that this is starting to make a difference.

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

Yours sincerely

Joan Bonenfant

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy