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Mrs Nicola Trayner
Headteacher
Accrington Woodnook Primary School
Hudson Street
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 2HS

Dear Mrs Trayner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Accrington Woodnook Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 28 April 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:

- strengthen the role of the governing body in driving school improvement and make sure that school leaders are held to account more rigorously by following meticulously the recommendations arising from the recent review of governance
- immediately improve procedures to manage the performance of teaching assistants by giving them all targets that are linked directly to pupils' progress and holding them to account for the progress made by pupils in their charge.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, pupils and members of the governing body and I also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I also had a tour of the school, examined information on current progress, scrutinised pupils' work and considered the report from the review of governance that had been undertaken by the local authority.

Context

An additional parent governor has been appointed since the previous inspection.

Main findings

School leaders, including governors, are united in their determination to improve this school. As headteacher, you have shown strong leadership and taken the inspection judgement 'on the chin', pulling the school together to face up to identified weaknesses. You know your school well and, as a result, you have quickly begun to tackle the stumbling blocks that prevented the school being judged good at the previous inspection. The action plan identifies precise success criteria to be met within tight timescales, thus providing a useful steer to help Accrington Woodnook rapidly become a good school.

Governors' impressive range of both personal and professional experience is beginning to be harnessed much more effectively for the benefit of the school. For example, plans are afoot for governors who are former pupils of the school to raise pupils' aspiration by addressing assemblies and talking about their achievements and a parent governor has recently established a football club after school which has become very popular with pupils. The recent review conducted by the local authority has not revealed serious shortcomings at governance level. Governors have responded positively to the previous inspection, on the whole, and are increasingly holding the school to account; they are less willing than they used to be to make excuses for poor performance.

According to the school's information, more pupils than this time last year are on target to make better than expected progress. This is partly because the school has increased the level of challenge in targets set for individual pupils. Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced 'target cards' that provide useful and clearly expressed information as to how pupils can set about improving their work. This information has met with resounding success from the pupils' point of view. Pupils I met with during my visit enthusiastically explained how this system is having a positive impact, saying: 'now work is more exciting because we can choose our own targets and we know how to get to a higher level'. Pupils clearly enjoy having the opportunity to get on with their own work, at their own pace, not being slowed down by waiting for everyone else to complete tasks. In this way, pupils have a sense of achievement, are encouraged to take responsibility for the next steps in their learning and can advance more quickly.

Pupils have noticed a number of differences since the inspection, such as the more rigorous use of 'sanction books' which help them to improve their behaviour. Attendance has improved on this time last year because of the strong stance the school has taken regarding parents withdrawing their children from school, for example by taking extended holidays. Nevertheless, some parents who still allow their children to be absent from school too frequently and for lame excuses, such as 'it was raining', are not helping their children to get the most they can from the education that the school provides. These parents could support their children and the school more effectively by making sure their child attends school regularly and turns up on time.

The monitoring of teachers' performance is more robust now because teachers have to meet with both yourself and the deputy every half term, not with just one of you as was formerly the case. Questions are asked, in what was described during my visit as a 'terrier-like'

fashion, if performance is not up to scratch. The expectation is clear that if pupils are falling behind you want something done about it, and quickly.

Since the inspection, staff have engaged in a programme of training to improve their teaching, for example on matching work in lessons more effectively to pupils' needs and abilities. You have introduced a new system whereby you accompany teachers to observe good practice and then you and the teacher have a detailed discussion about what they have seen and how they can apply it to their own teaching. You then follow this up through learning walks that are focused on specific aspects of teaching that you feel require improvement. As a result, teachers have a clearer idea of what they need to improve and how to go about improving it; they also know that you will check up whether this has made a difference to the quality of pupil's learning.

The quality of the contribution made to pupils' progress by teaching assistants is too mixed, although examples of excellent practice do exist, for example in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Systems to manage their performance are not robust as they are insufficiently linked with the progress pupils make. As a result, some teaching assistants are less effective and do not have a clear sense of their responsibility for pupils' progress.

You have improved the way in which you check up on the quality of marking. As a result, when I examined books during the visit, I saw examples of exemplary practice in marking. This good practice is almost universal across all classes and year groups, leading to pupils producing at times some excellent pieces of imaginative and well-informed writing. On the odd occasion, however, teachers do not always pick up on the responses pupils have made to teachers' comments, sometimes leading to slight misunderstandings or repeated errors. As marking is so thorough, regular and of generally such high quality, this weakness should not be too difficult to sort out.

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 the level of support offered and a representative is working more intensively with the school to accelerate the rate of improvement. The local authority has set up links with other good schools, for example to ensure that teachers' assessments of pupils' work are accurate. The local authority is working with the school to establish more rigorous systems to manage the performance of teaching assistants.

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/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- < Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies