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Mrs Louise Thompson
Headteacher
Simonside Primary School
Bedeburn Road
Westerhope
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE5 4LG

Dear Mrs Thompson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Simonside Primary School, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Following my visit to your school on 8 May 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 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, governors and the local authority are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- further strengthen the impact of the monitoring of teaching by making clear in leaders' records the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress, particularly for different groups, for example, more-able pupils.
- ensure that the records of governing body meetings show clearly the challenge provided by governors and the responses from school leaders to any issues and questions raised.

Evidence

During my visit, I held meetings with you and with other senior leaders, and also with leaders responsible for literacy and mathematics. I also met with an adviser

from the local authority and with the school's achievement partner. In addition, I discussed the impact of governance with the Chair of the Governing body and with two other governors. Jointly, we evaluated the school improvement plan and a range of other documentation, including records of the outcomes of the monitoring of teaching. In addition, we briefly visited each class in the school to look at teaching and to talk to some pupils about their work. We also scrutinised a small sample of pupils' work from Year 6.

Context

There have been no significant changes to staffing or the school's context since the time of the last inspection. Owing to extended staff absence, the Year 3 class is currently being taught by a long-term supply teacher.

Main findings

Although disappointed by the outcome, school leaders and governors, and the local authority, have responded rapidly to the findings of the recent inspection. In conjunction with other senior staff, you are providing strong and decisive leadership, including by confronting and resolving challenging issues. Most importantly of all, school leaders have simply got on with the job of improving teaching with great determination and resolve. As a result, the overall quality of teaching is improving quickly and pupils are now making better progress than at the time of the last inspection. The Ofsted action plan provides a clear framework to support improvement and is regularly reviewed and updated in the light of progress. The governing body receives detailed information about the work of the school and is able to provide challenge and support in equal measure. This is ensuring that governors are able to maintain a good understanding of the impact of actions taken to improve the school. However, the minutes of governing body meetings do not always note clearly where governors have asked questions or sought clarification, or where school leaders have provided information in response.

A more consistent approach to promoting good behaviour is also bringing about improvement. Similarly, a concerted focus on better attendance has reduced the level of overall and persistent absence. The school is a calm and purposeful learning environment, and the many displays are testament to the improving quality of pupils' work. The leadership of teaching is increasingly effective. Middle leaders are contributing significantly to this, including through their support for the professional development of staff, as well as in monitoring teaching and checking the impact of marking and feedback. Through a systematic approach to developing teaching, leaders have built up a detailed profile of teachers' strengths and points for development. This is helping ensure that teachers receive the support they need promptly and effectively. However, leaders' evaluations of teaching do not always make clear the link between the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. For example, although leaders' checks show that teachers are planning to

meet the needs of more-able pupils, the impact of teaching on the progress made by this group is not always fully clear.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. At the time of this visit, it is my judgement that the school is well placed to benefit from an early re-inspection. The timing of this inspection will be discussed with the school and with senior colleagues at Ofsted.

External support

The local authority has provided effective and judicious support for this improving school. For example, the advice and guidance of the school's achievement partner has helped to strengthen the impact of leadership at the school. Similarly, the work of the monitoring support group has provided useful challenge to school leaders and governors and is helping to maintain the pace of improvement. The school has also made good use of support provided through the Outer West Learning Trust, which consists of ten local primary schools of which this school is also a member. Trust schools have provided useful opportunities for staff to observe good practice and this has contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching being made at the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector