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Miss Jill Connell
Headteacher
Whitehill Primary School
Whitehill Street West
Heaton Norris
Stockport
Cheshire
SK4 1PB

Dear Miss Connell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Whitehill Primary School, Stockport

Following my visit to the school on 19 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 February 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. They should take immediate action to:

- Increase the school's capacity to improve by making sure all leaders demonstrate the actions they take have an impact on raising pupils' achievement.
- Accelerate the review of how the school spends the pupil premium grant and act immediately on its findings. (The pupil premium is government money given to schools to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals; those who are in care, looked after by the local authority; and children whose parents and carers serve in the armed forces)
- Rapidly organise meetings with the Consultant Leader in Stockport at St Elisabeth's C of E Primary School and put into action her recommendations for action.
- Reduce the gap between the attainment and progress of groups of pupils, in particular the gap between boys' and girls' attainment.

Evidence

During the visit, I held a meeting with you and then a meeting with you and three senior leaders. I had a brief tour of the school to see pupils working in classes. I met with a representative of the local authority and also met with four members of the governing body. At your request I also very briefly met with the teaching assistant in charge of improving pastoral aspects of the school and I also met with the subject leader for mathematics.

Context

Three members of the governing body resigned after the inspection. The deputy headteacher changed classes as did another teacher.

Main findings

Senior leaders have not taken swift enough action to make the necessary changes to improve the school. In the last inspection report, the lead inspector recommended a review into how the school uses the pupil premium. Although this very important review is planned to take place in the next few months, it is unfortunate it has not happened by the time of this visit. As a result the school has not started to take the action it needs to make sure the funding is well spent and to raise the attainment of those supported by the pupil premium and accelerate the progress they make.

The school's capacity to improve quickly needs to be strengthened. Except for the headteacher, other leaders had difficulty identifying the impact their actions had on increasing pupils' achievement. The assessment data appear to be confused. In one year for example indications are that pupils have, in two terms, made close to two years progress in mathematics but the same children have only made two terms progress in reading. The school should make its assessment and data systems secure and accurate. Senior leaders should take responsibility for collating and using the data in the subjects they lead to provide information to the headteacher and governors about pupils' progress and increasing attainment in those subjects. The school should commission a review of leadership and management to make sure the headteacher is not solely responsible for leading and managing the school and to make sure leaders have the necessary skills to lead their subjects.

Senior leaders have taken some action to improve aspects of the school's work. According to senior leaders for example, teachers' marking of pupils' writing has improved. They have anecdotal evidence that pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. They also have evidence, by looking through pupils' work, that all teachers are using the same marking system and are following the agreed guidelines. Senior leaders' checking of lessons and pupils' work has revealed that in English lessons pupils are now given time to respond to the comments made by the teacher.

Senior leaders have introduced extra sessions in phonics (sounds and the letters they represent in reading and writing) for pupils who are supported by the pupil premium. Early indications suggest that pupils' ability to read using phonics has improved from last year.

The improvement plan identifies appropriate actions for the school to take to tackle all of the points for improvement that were identified in the inspection report. It identifies clearly who should lead each of the actions but the person monitoring the success of the actions should be changed so it is not the same person who leads the actions. It is positive to see a plan which does not try to cover all aspects at once. It is staged well over the next year to make sure improvements are completed thoroughly. The plan needs further amendments to make sure it plots a route for the school to be judged good at the next inspection. For example, in 2013 boys were almost two years behind girls in reading, writing and mathematics yet there is no mention in the plan to reduce the gap between these two groups of pupils.

The governing body has reviewed its systems and has challenged members to be fully committed to attending meetings, as a result, three members resigned. It has undertaken a skills audit to identify members' skills and find out which are missing. A new appointment to the governing body brings some additional skills to fill some of these gaps. The governors who met me said there had been a change in the governing body since the inspection. There is more debate, discussion and disagreement; more scrutiny of the information given to them and improved questions to senior leaders.

Ofsted will carry out further visits, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I have serious concerns about the quality of education provided and in particular the capacity of leadership and management. I will return to the school soon to monitor progress.

External support

The local authority has continued its intensive support for the school. It has organised a Consultant Leader in Stockport from St Elisabeth's C of E Primary School to help the school make progress. The initial meeting was cancelled and no further meeting has been arranged. The members of the governing body with whom I spoke did not know the name of the support school and have not met with the Consultant Leader. As a result the senior leaders have not benefitted from the experience or advice from the Consultant Leader.

The school has commissioned its own external advice and consultancy but the impact of this has not been measured and is unclear.

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

Yours sincerely

Allan Torr
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – Stockport