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Mrs Cathie Masztalerz
Headteacher
St Stephen's CofE Primary School
Audenshaw Road
Audenshaw
Manchester
Tameside
M34 5HD

Dear Mrs Masztalerz

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Stephen's CofE Primary School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 13 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- revise the action plan so that it:
 - extends at least to September 2015
 - gives a clear indication of precisely how much improvement in attainment and progress is expected in specific subjects and for particular groups of pupils over that time
 - includes precise figures, so that the school will be able to determine whether enough improvement has been made at key points during that period
 - indicates more clearly what actions the school will take to bring about improvements in specific areas.

- improve governance by:
 - completing the review of governance within the stated time
 - producing a clear plan for its future development, which includes training on the analysis of data and on how to be effective in holding the school to account
 - ensuring that the Governing Body has complete membership.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held meetings with you, the deputy headteacher, two members of the Governing Body, including the Vice Chair, a representative of the local authority, a representative of the Diocese and a group of six pupils chosen at random from Years 5 and 6.

Context

Since the inspection, the number of children at the school has reduced slightly from 206 to 198. Additional part-time staff have been brought in to give further support in each class and a full-time member of staff has been recruited to focus on improving the performance of pupils supported through pupil premium funding. In September, out of the seven classes in the school, four will have new teachers. One of these teachers has already been appointed. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she will also be a member of the senior leadership team. Two governors have recently resigned and have not yet been replaced.

Main findings

Despite your disappointment, you, the staff and governors recognise that the school requires improvement. Since the inspection, you have recruited additional staff to give extra support to individual pupils or groups of pupils who need it. Year 5 pupils are making an early start on the work that they would not normally begin until September. Staff have been provided with training on a number of relevant areas, including guided reading, questioning and aspects of mathematics. You have introduced the 'Big Maths' and 'Minute Maths' schemes and have revised your calculation policy. Last month, you conducted an enrichment day where all children had individual meetings with their class teachers to discuss their targets, their current level of attainment and the progress they have made since the beginning of the academic year. The evaluation on this day showed that it had been of most benefit for the older pupils and that further work needs to be done to make such events more meaningful for pupils in Key Stage 1.

The pupils to whom I spoke were enthusiastic about the 'Big Maths' approach and the way this provides them with greater challenge and more focused support, so that they can make faster progress. They welcomed the additional activities and

equipment being provided for them during playtimes. They also found the enrichment day informative and useful.

Your action plan includes the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. It identifies who will be responsible for leading each aspect, how and when monitoring will take place and what criteria will be used to measure success. However, those success criteria are not sufficiently clear. For example, when the plan refers to closing '*the gap of attainment of boys and pupil premium pupils*', it is not clear by how much that gap is expected to close and by when. Under the section on improving reading, one of your milestones is '*E-books used in school, particularly with boys*'. However, there is no indication of what impact the use of this technology is meant to have on pupils' progress. It would be beneficial for you to specify, for example, the number of books you would like them to read, the different types of writing you want them to read, whether you want them to , to be able to decipher words more fluently, or to be able to infer what is implied in the text. The plan does not always give a sufficient indication of what is to be done to bring about the intended improvements. For example, in the section on spelling, punctuation and grammar, the focus is on giving all children '*a level in SPAG termly*' and on conducting book scrutinies to check on its application. However, it is not clear what training the teachers will receive or how they will change their practice in order to bring about improvements in this area.

You have set targets, based on levels of progress, for 2014 but nothing beyond that. Therefore, it is not clear how much progress you expect over the next two years. Although you have identified milestones for reporting to governors from now until July 2015, you do not indicate what outcomes you expect at each of those stages. Therefore, it will not be possible to determine whether or not you are on track to reach your goals. A further weakness of the action plan is that too often it confuses actions, outcomes and monitoring.

The review of the governing body has been delayed and the action plan for governors is not scheduled to be finalised until July. With the resignation of two of its members, the governing body is not complete. It is unclear what training governors have received since the inspection. On the day before my visit, three governors had conducted a learning walk and produced brief, general comments on what they had seen. However, without a clearer indication of what the school is aiming to do, it is difficult to assess whether what they saw indicated sufficient improvement. For the same reason, the analyses of pupils' progress that you conduct will have less impact than they might.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I will re-visit the school next term to determine whether the pace of improvement has increased. At that time, I will need to meet the full governing body.

External support

Since the inspection, you have received four visits from the Diocesan representative whom you have found to be very helpful. Under her chairmanship, a monitoring group has been set up to conduct half-termly reviews of the progress made by the school. This group will include you, the deputy headteacher, the local authority representative, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. To date, this group has met once to agree on its focus, procedures and schedule of meetings.

The local authority representative has only recently been assigned to your school and will shortly be conducting his own monitoring visit, to gain an understanding of how to help the school move forward. The local authority is seeking to appoint a teacher on a temporary basis to support the school and provide additional guidance to staff. However, such a teacher has not yet been identified.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Tameside and the Diocesan Director of Education for Manchester.

Yours sincerely

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector