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Mr Matthew Towe
Acting Headteacher
Lancaster Ryelands Primary School
Torrisholme Road
Lancaster
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Towe

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lancaster Ryelands Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to the school on 23 June 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 March 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:

- Evaluate how well phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) are taught and implement changes so that the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level of phonics by the end of Year 1 at least matches the national average.
- Improve the school's improvement plans so they have clear actions, the impact of which can be easily measured by the governing body. Ensure the named staff who monitor the implementation of the actions are different to the staff leading the actions. Make sure the action plans are not too lengthy and are tightly focussed on plotting a route for the school to be judged as good at its next inspection.
- Review the staff's roles, particularly staff who hold middle leadership positions, to make sure there is a positive impact on pupils' achievement of the work they carry out.
- Evaluate how well writing is taught and implement changes to teaching so that pupils' writing is at least at the level it should be for their different ages.

Evidence

During the inspection, I held a meeting with yourself and toured the school to meet pupils, teachers and to look at the classrooms. I met with two representatives of the governing body and two representatives of the local authority. I met with a group of Year 6 prefects and held a meeting with four senior leaders. I looked at documents including the school's improvement plan and briefly met the headteacher who starts in September.

Context

The headteacher left the school at Easter so as deputy headteacher, you took the role of acting headteacher until the new headteacher starts work in a few weeks' time. There have been some internal changes to roles and responsibility, some temporarily until September.

Main findings

You have continued the improvement measures that were started by the previous headteacher. In addition, you have been working effectively on the weaknesses identified at the Ofsted inspection in March. So for example, to make sure pupils in every class are challenged to produce their best work, you have,

- led pupil progress meetings to identify each pupil that needs extra challenge and improvement
- worked with a teaching and learning consultant to train staff in how to ask better questions to pupils
- led improvements to the feedback pupils get back through marking.

As a result of these changes, according to the local authority review, pupils are more challenged in lessons, they have more opportunities to respond to teachers' comments and corrections; and staff ask better questions that make pupils think more deeply and explain their thinking. Evidence from the school's end of year assessments indicate an improvement to the proportion of pupils in Year 2 attaining the higher Level 3, particularly in reading and mathematics, and the proportion of pupils in Year 6 attaining the higher Level 5, again particularly in reading and mathematics.

There is still a great deal of work to do, and quickly, for the school to be judged good at its next inspection. In phonics for example, there has been little improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level in the Year 1 phonics check. The staff should, ready for September, undertake a review of phonics teaching, the amount, the quality of lessons, how it is taught and the attainment and progress different groups of pupils make.

Similarly, there is still a lot of work to do in writing in which, not enough pupils reach the expected level for their age. One improvement is that pupils now write daily and in more subjects than they did previously. The staff should undertake a review of writing taking into account, how it is taught, pupils' views about their lessons, the rate of progress different groups of pupils make and the quality of teaching.

The pupils that spoke to me said there had been improvements to pupils behaviour and their attendance. They talked about one development that has worked whereby when someone has done wrong they have to write a letter to their parents to explain what they have done. Pupils said the impact of this has been a reduction in incidents in class and at break times. The staff have worked effectively with families to reduce the amount of time groups of pupils are absent. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs, those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and boys attend more often.

There have been changes to leadership at all levels. As a result some of the staff roles and responsibilities are blurred so, for example, is it not clear the exact responsibilities of the assistant headteachers compared with the year group team leaders. As a result it is difficult for members of the governing body to hold leaders to account for actions they have led. Likewise, the measures to assess whether the actions taken have been successful or not, are very difficult to measure. As a result members of the governing body find it too complex to say what impact the actions have had on improving pupils' achievement. The improvement plan needs to be improved ready for September. In addition to better measures it also needs to be more focussed. The member of staff leading the improvements is at the moment often the same one who checks whether the actions have been successful. As a result the staff can inspect and check on their own actions. These roles should be separate and independent. The plan does not plot a course to becoming good at the next inspection but it does cover all of the weaknesses identified by Ofsted.

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

For the last two years the local authority has provided good quality intensive support. As a result, standards in the Early years Foundation Stage have risen significantly. The quality of teaching has improved. The staff for example have benefitted from visits from a local authority approved teaching and learning consultant and staff have visited other schools to observe good practice. The staff have worked with Woodlands Primary School in Skelmersdale which has helped their management of behaviour.

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

Allan Torr

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority