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19 September 2014

Mrs Joan Lumsdon  
Headteacher  
Castletown Primary School  
Grange Road  
Castletown  
Sunderland  
Tyne and Wear  
SR5 3EQ

Dear Mrs Lumsdon

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Castletown Primary School, Sunderland**

Following my visit to your school on 18 September 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 May 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:

- amend school improvement planning so that there are clear targets for the progress of different pupil groups
- commission an external review of governance once the reconstitution of the governing body has been completed
- initiate support from a good or outstanding school with a proven track record of improving teaching.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the school action plan,

recent information about pupils' progress and documents relating to the checks made on the quality of teaching. We also undertook a learning walk to each class.

## **Context**

Three teachers, a teaching assistant and a learning mentor have all joined the school since the May inspection. Two members of staff are currently absent from school. These classes are being taught by supply teachers. The Chair of Governors resigned at the end of the summer term. The vice-chair is currently performing this role until a successor can be elected. Two new governors have recently been appointed. The governing body is about to begin a formal process of reconstitution.

## **Main findings**

While disappointed by the outcome of the May inspection, you have used it as an opportunity to reinvigorate staff and provide a new sense of purpose to your improvement work. Staffing turbulence over recent months has contributed to the school's current position, but you have not allowed these circumstances to be used as an excuse. Instead, you have focused your efforts on reviewing current practice and realise that, over time, there has been too much variation in both the quality of teaching and how well different groups of pupils achieve. Importantly, school action planning now identifies improvements to the leadership of teaching as pivotal in achieving a better quality and consistency of practice.

Prompt improvements to the systems for checking on the quality of teaching are already allowing both senior and middle leaders to hold teachers more robustly to account. Staff now recognise that it is the typical quality of teaching, day-to-day, that is of most importance rather than their performance in a one-off, planned lesson observation. Everyone is adapting quickly to this change in culture. Middle leaders, in particular, are contributing to this shift in thinking by aligning their scrutiny of work, classroom observation and analysis of pupils' progress to ensure a rounded view of teaching and a more accurate view of what pupils receive day-in, day-out. Leaders, including governors, are less aware of the difference teaching is making to the progress of different pupil groups because school improvement planning does not include targets for what different groups of pupils, such as those who are in receipt of pupil premium, are expected to achieve. This makes it difficult for governors to hold leaders fully to account for this area of work.

Governance is undergoing a period of transition. Nevertheless, a core group of established members have increased the rigour with which they hold you to account, including through the newly formed 'challenge group'. Your invitation for governors to join senior leaders during their monitoring activities has been readily accepted and is allowing those involved a greater depth of understanding about the work of the school. As a consequence, you are now being asked more pertinent questions about the decisions you have made and the difference they are making for pupils. As the reconstitution of the governing body gets underway and a new Chair of

Governors is elected, an external review of governance should be commissioned to evaluate how governors, both new and old, can better contribute to improvement.

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 supported the school effectively to develop its leadership capacity, particularly in the areas of special educational needs, the early years and mathematics. You particularly appreciate the 'fresh pair of eyes' that the link adviser brings to the evaluation of planned actions during challenge meetings.

As more specific analysis of teaching is undertaken, further brokered support from a good or outstanding school will enable teaching to move even further forward. This link should be initiated quickly, in partnership with the local authority, so that all staff can gain maximum benefit from observing the very best practice outside of their own school.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**