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Mrs Rachael Bentham
Headteacher
Woodhouses Voluntary Primary School
Ashton Road
Woodhouses
Failsworth
Manchester
M35 9WL

Dear Mrs Bentham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodhouses Voluntary Primary School, Oldham

Following my visit to the 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 June 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:

- conduct and implement the actions following the external review of governance
- revise the action plan to tackle the slow progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and to make clear the actions that need to be taken to be judged as good at the next inspection
- implement changes to the teaching of phonics, spelling and grammar.

Evidence

I met with you and with a group of four members of the governing body. I met with four pupils who are captains of the four school houses and toured the school to see pupils in their classes. I looked through the school's action plan following the most recent Ofsted inspection.

Context

Since the inspection, three teachers have left the school one of whom was the deputy headteacher.

Main findings

The most recent inspection identified a need for an external review of governance. This has not taken place and there are no concrete plans in place to conduct the review. As a result, vital time has been lost and members of the governing body do not have a precise understanding of what improvements must be implemented for governance to be judged good at the next inspection or the overall effectiveness of the school. The governing body has reconstituted and decreased from 17 members to 12 and the committee have been reorganised into working groups which mirror the four Ofsted judgements of achievement, teaching, behaviour and safety, and leadership and management. There is no discernible impact from these changes as yet. Governors as a priority must check and improve the school's action plans for improvement and implement a better system for monitoring pupils' achievement frequently throughout the year. For example, the governors I spoke with were unaware of the end of year assessment results for each of the year groups.

The post-Ofsted action plan covers the points for improvement identified at the most recent inspection. However, in some areas it is unclear exactly what the school is going to do to improve. To improve challenge in lessons for example there is a list of measures and checks that senior leaders will use but there is no clear strategy for improving pupils' depth of knowledge, skills and understanding.

In the action plan, there needs to be a greater focus on what needs to be improved to be judged as good at the next inspection. For example, there is not enough mention of subjects other than English and mathematics, there is no mention of the Early Years Foundation Stage despite the fact that at the end of Reception, children lag behind other children of this age nationally.

The headteacher has successfully implemented some improvements to teaching. Pupils that I spoke with confirmed that teachers' marking is more helpful which means pupils have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve. Pupils also mention that 'hinge' questions are having a positive impact. Teachers pose a key question and then group pupils based on their answer to tackle any errors, any misunderstanding they have and also to challenge them further.

One of the main barriers to school improvement has been the turnover in staff which has slowed the school's progress. Out of five classes, two teachers are temporary until new teachers can be appointed which means the school has been unable to develop and improve middle leadership. Teachers no longer lead on subjects which means there is only the headteacher who is able to lead developments in subjects such as history, geography, science and music.

As a priority, despite having temporary teachers, the school must implement a systematic way of teaching reading and phonics, of tracking pupils' progress in phonics, and of teaching spelling and grammar. Pupils' attainment at the end of Reception and Year 1 is not high enough.

Her Majesty's Inspector will return to the school as soon as possible.

External support

Prior to the inspection there was not enough support from the local authority. Since the inspection the local authority has provided funding for an experienced deputy headteacher to work at the school every week and an experienced headteacher to help to improve teaching. It is too early to see any impact of this support.

The local authority's school improvement team has helped to smooth the departure of three teachers that left the school and to provide guidance in improving the school's ability to manage teachers' performance.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Oldham 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 – including where the school is an academy
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school is a non-maintained special school
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