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Mr Michael Cowieson
Headteacher
Old Hall Drive Primary School
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Dear Mr Cowieson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Old Hall Drive Primary School, Manchester

Following my visit to your school on 2 October, 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 June 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- refine the school's post-Ofsted action plan, identifying which priorities are the most pressing and therefore should be tackled first
- ensure that the staff responsible for each action in the plan are different from those responsible for monitoring and evaluating its impact
- make sure that the achievement targets in the plan clarify senior leaders' and governors' expectations for the different groups of pupils in the school, enabling them to keep a close eye on each group's progress
- ensure that plans for improving the quality of teaching are implemented swiftly to bring about essential improvements, for example in the teaching of mathematics and writing

- make sure that the roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability for the external consultants employed by the school are clear in order to capitalise on their expertise
- make sure that teachers' marking is incisive to maximise its impact on pupils' progress
- make sure that shortcomings in the school's website are dealt with so that it complies with statutory requirements
- ensure greater urgency by senior leaders' to improve the work of the school.

Evidence

During the visit, I held a meeting with you and other members of the senior leadership team. During this meeting we considered your post-Ofsted action plan; written in response to the findings of the most recent inspection. We also spent time discussing the actions you and your colleagues are taking to improve the school. This discussion was supplemented by the further meetings I held with a representative of the local authority, six members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors, the subject leaders for mathematics and English, seven class teachers and a group of Year 5 pupils. I also scrutinised the single central record. This is the record of the checks made by the school on the suitability of adults to work with children. I examined senior leaders' records of the key changes to the school since the previous inspection and their most up-to-date evaluation of how well the school is doing. I scrutinised the work in a sample of pupils' books. This enabled me to consider the degree of challenge of the work that pupils have been given to do and also the quality of teachers' marking. I evaluated the quality of the school's website to determine whether it complied with statutory requirements.

Context

Since the inspection the subject leader for mathematics has left the school and another member of staff has been given responsibility for this area of the curriculum. You have undertaken a review of senior leadership. As a result the roles and responsibilities of yourself, the deputy headteacher and the two assistant headteachers have been redefined in order to align them more closely with the school's improvement priorities. The governors are currently recruiting for a teacher to fill a vacancy in Year 6.

Main findings

There is general agreement among the different groups of stakeholders that the judgement of 'requires improvement' at the most recent inspection accurately describes the school's current position on its journey of improvement.

The school's website is colourful, well designed and relatively straight forward to navigate. However, some of the specified information that schools are required to publish is either out-of-date or missing. For example information about how parents

can apply for a place for their child is incomplete, there is no information about the school's curriculum and the school's behaviour policy is missing. The impact of the actions the school is taking to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, as described in the report on the pupil premium, are not sharp enough. The school's charging and remissions policy and the governors' report on the implementation of its policy for pupils with special educational needs are both missing. As a result, the school's website does not meet statutory requirements.

Senior leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing is concise and focused on the four key areas from the inspection handbook. This evaluation has been informed by the inspection findings and as a result provides senior leaders and governors with a broadly accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. The latter have then be used to inform the post-Ofsted action plan. However, some of the improvement priorities for achievement are not clear. For example, you have identified that the school needs to narrow the achievement gap for vulnerable groups and accelerate their progress, without giving measurable targets for either.

The post-Ofsted action plan is a detailed document, which attempts to clearly identify the school's improvement priorities and describes the actions to be taken to achieve them. Measures of success for a number of these actions are also clear enabling senior leaders and governors to gauge whether particular actions have had or will have the desired impact. However, not all the success criteria in the plan are as sharp as this. For example senior leaders' targets for pupils' attainment and progress are overall school targets and are not expressed in terms of the school's expectations for individual groups. Consequently, it is difficult for senior leaders and governors to know what improvements are expected for these groups or enable them to assess whether any rate of improvement in both measures is rapid enough.

The action plan does not make clear what the time scales are for each of the improvement priorities or have them listed in an order of importance. Consequently, it is not clear which of the priorities are the most pressing and should be done first in order to have the greatest impact on pupils' outcomes. This lack of clarity is slowing the progress of the school to becoming good as senior leaders are trying to address all the priorities for improvement at the same time; with peripheral issues and fundamental actions to improve the school, like improving the quality of teaching and learning being given equal precedence. Lines of accountability in the plan are also blurred. For example there are instances of members of staff being responsible for leading on an action also being responsible for monitoring and evaluating its impact.

Since the inspection you have decided to engage the services of a number of education consultants to assist you and your colleagues deliver the priorities in the post-Ofsted action plan. However, the terms under which each of these external professionals have been employed are not crisp enough. It is not clear what your expectations of them are or what you expect the intended impact of their work to

be. In directing school resources in this way an opportunity is being missed to develop the capacity of your own staff to make effective and sustained change.

Senior leaders have worked hard to make sure that the school's marking policy is implemented consistently across the school. In the sample of books that I scrutinised work had been marked regularly and in compliance with school policy. However, some teachers' comments advising pupils how to improve their work are not demanding enough. Consequently, opportunities to accelerate pupils' progress by insightful marking are being missed.

I intend to 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 adviser is relatively new to the school. She is aware of the challenges faced by senior leaders as they work to deliver the post-Ofsted action plan. The adviser is currently involved in quality assuring senior leaders' work and providing governors with an external evaluation of its impact. She has successfully brokered a link with an effective local primary school with the intention of providing staff with a source of help and advice. However, the impact of this initiative on pupils' outcomes has yet to be realised.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector