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Mrs Lesley Ironmonger
Headteacher
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Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Ironmonger

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Waterloo Primary School, Tameside

Following my visit to your school on 3 October 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. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- review the action plan to ensure that:
 - key dates are identified when specific training is to be carried out so that slippage in meeting targets does not occur
 - named persons are clearly linked to key targets to ensure accountability
- ensure that key policies such as reading, writing, calculation etcetera. are applied consistently across the school to make sure that pupils do not get mixed messages
- improve the quality of pupils' writing, not only in English but also across the curriculum
- continue to challenge and eradicate poor and anti-social behaviour, such as bullying so that all pupils find school to be an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with yourself, a small group of governors as well as several pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with the local authority adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. The school's development plan, alongside other documentation which you provided, was evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with you focussed on the learning environment around the school with a particular focus on how effectively writing is being improved.

Context

There have been significant staff changes with five new teachers taking up post from September. In addition an acting deputy headteacher has been seconded to the school to replace the substantive post holder who gained a post in another school at the end of the summer term. These changes have necessitated the restructuring of several posts of responsibility across the school. The governing body has also been reconstituted with several new members co-opted to provide a wider range of skills and experience.

Main findings

The post inspection action plan is coherent and addresses the key issues for improvement. It identifies a range of very practical strategies to improve practice, most of which are grounded in the classroom. Milestones are progressive and mostly linked to specific outcomes for pupils. Accountability is less clear because for many of the specified actions there are no named personnel. Also specified dates for training events and meetings are not identified and this omission could result in slippage in the proposed improvement timetable.

Standards have improved, although not yet quickly enough. Downward trends have been reversed. There remain inconsistencies reflecting a legacy of some weaker teaching in the past. There has been some improvement in reading and mathematics but writing remains an area where pupils, and boys in particular, make least progress across the school.

Pupils who were interviewed were generally positive, but realistic, about the school. They felt that it was 'getting better but could still be improved'. They recognised that general behaviour around the school had improved and that the school is a lot quieter and more disciplined than previously. Movement around the school and in corridors is orderly and more controlled. This is helped by the visible presence of adults. Outdoor play is also considered to be more stimulating and is better organised than previously. Again, the increased presence of adults is a contributory factor. Pupils stated that 'we do not live in a perfect world' and that, at times, lessons are still disrupted by a minority of pupils who display anti-social attitudes.

They expressed some concerns about bullying and the rigour and consistency with which it is dealt with. Incidents of bullying have decreased but remains a concern because pupils feel that more could still be done to eradicate and deal with it. Homophobic and hurtful personal name-calling still persists. Girls in particular were very articulate and mature in expressing their concerns and views. Pupils enjoy most lessons, but especially PE, notably those sessions taken by specialist coaches. They feel tasks set in class are not easy but neither are they too difficult. The girls, unlike the boys, feel that 'Golden Time' on a Friday could be used more productively. Marking and feedback is more informative, especially in English and mathematics and pupils recognise they are expected to act on these recommendations.

During the learning walk with yourself and your deputy, we focussed on how well writing was being developed across the curriculum as well as the extent to which pupils were fully involved in their learning. Writing remains an issue because poor practice is still not being challenged consistently across the school. In the lower school, too much time is still wasted in lessons by pupils being occupied cutting out and pasting rather than actually practicing and developing letter formation or writing simple sentences. In mathematics lessons, older pupils were observed using squared paper to print titles and learning objectives and making too many spelling errors when at their age they should be joining up writing. This can result in them developing bad writing habits. A significant minority of older pupils are still not holding their pens and pencils correctly which is further inhibiting their writing. In a Year 5 lesson, a pupil had written several paragraphs which contained several spelling mistakes. When asked, the pupil acknowledged that there were mistakes and pointed one out. Unfortunately, the response to making corrections was a look of bemusement and a mumbled 'I must try harder'. In fact, simply reaching for a dictionary could have solved the problem – yet these were not at hand. It is clear that small changes, consistently applied throughout the school, could rectify all these issues and support improvement in pupils' writing. There is a clear desire and commitment among staff and senior leaders to continue to make improvements and build on the better results gained by pupils in the summer tests.

Governors recognise that, in part, they have not been sufficiently rigorous in holding management to account and that there are gaps in their knowledge, especially in their ability to understand and interpret data. A review of governance is due to take place later this term and there is a commitment to act on the findings. Governance has been reconstituted with specific governors now attached to cover specific aspects of school management and life. The level of training has intensified and governors are now regularly attending courses to put them in a better position to both challenge and support school leaders and middle managers. They are now beginning to compare their school performance with similar schools in the local area to enable them to evaluate and challenge what is going on in their own school. They are in a better position to evaluate the work of the school than previously – although they acknowledge that skill gaps still remain.

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 school is receiving good support from the local authority. The officer responsible for schools that require improvement in the local authority involves the school in a programme of shared development and training with schools in similar circumstances. Support is offered in ensuring that new appointments being made are of suitable experience and calibre. Help and training has been provided for you to ensure that management duties such as monitoring of teaching and learning are now more secure and rigorous. Support is being brokered from other schools as it is required and the school has taken advantage of this. In addition, work is ongoing to develop subject leadership to enable them to support teachers, build up their confidence and deliver improved lessons across a full range of subjects. A good partnership is being established based on professional dialogue and support.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector