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Mick Murphy
Headteacher
Claregate Primary School
Chester Avenue
Tettenhall
Wolverhampton
WV6 9JU

Dear Mr Murphy

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Claregate Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 8 October 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in 29 January 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:

- strengthen governance with close support of the local authority
- ensure that teachers develop their skills in using information about pupils' achievement in order to provide work which challenges pupils of different abilities
- train subject leaders for reading, writing and mathematics in how to observe and make judgements about teaching and learning based on first-hand evidence
- ensure that teachers have the necessary skills to teach all aspects of reading and writing effectively
- inject more rigour into monitoring and evaluation so that it is systematic and the evidence gathered feeds into a thorough and accurate assessment of the school's work particularly the quality of teaching.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, three governors, including the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including information about pupils' achievement, governance and the school's work to keep pupils' safe. During this visit you and a representative accompanied me on visits to all classrooms to review work in pupils' books and observe their learning in lessons.

Context

Since my previous visit, three teachers have left the school. A new subject leader for English and one for the Early Years Foundation Stage have been appointed.

Main findings

The actions that have been taken since the my previous visit are not helping pupils, particularly the least able and those known to be eligible for free school meals, to make faster progress. Results at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2014 show that, in Year 6, a third of pupils with low results at the end of Year 2 did not make the expected progress in reading. Pupils do not read widely or often enough and do not have access to high-quality children's literature. Reading areas in all classroom visited were untidy with books lying on the floor or treated without due care and attention. Teachers do not influence pupils' wider reading choices well enough. Consequently, pupils do not develop reading stamina or develop a love of reading.

Progress made by the youngest pupils in early reading is inconsistent. This is because phonics (the sounds that letters make) is not systematically taught. Visits to classrooms confirmed that teachers' knowledge of how to teach this aspect of reading is poor. A number of pupils in Key Stage 1 are not able to apply their knowledge of phonics to tackle unfamiliar words when they are reading. They are not able to use their phonic knowledge to help them to spell when they are writing. Errors in pupils' letter formation are left uncorrected. Teachers do not regularly check the way pupils are holding their pencils when they are writing. As a result, pupils' handwriting lacks fluency, particularly in Year 1. The quality of teachers' own handwriting does not always follow stated policy. The implicit message to pupils is that the quality of your handwriting does not matter.

Teaching is not improving quickly enough to have a significant impact on pupils' learning, particularly in Key Stage 1 and in Early Years Foundation Stage. This is because teachers are not using information about pupils' achievement in order to provide work that challenges pupils of different abilities. There is no clear policy or system for teaching reading across the school; this is a major reason why around third of low-ability pupils are not making expected progress in reading. Another

related factor is that insufficient attention has been paid to delivering high-quality training to improve teachers' skills in the teaching of reading and writing. For example, in the four phonic lessons visited, pupils were all completing the same task. Consequently, many pupils are working on skills that they have already mastered.

Evidence from short visits to lessons and pupils' books show variability in the standard of pupils' work. Teachers pay too little attention to promoting pupils' understanding of how the English language is structured. As a result, pupils do not understand how sentences are constructed (grammar) and the impact this has on their writing mainly because they are not taught this important skill. Teachers focus on other aspects such as identifying similes or the features of particular types of text, even for pupils for whom this work is well beyond their ability. Even the writing of more-able pupils, for whom such work would be appropriate, is limited by their inability to use grammar well.

Since my previous visit you have taken a number of appropriate actions. The improvement plan now provides more detail of the actions that will be taken to improve teaching and help pupils make better progress. You visit lessons more regularly and you provide staff with feedback on how to improve their practice. However, there are number of reasons why you and other leaders are not making enough of a difference to improving teachers' skills and pupils' learning in all subjects and classes. The procedures for checking teachers' work are not rigorous enough because you do not follow up any identified weaknesses quickly enough. Marking of pupils' work is regular and adheres to new school policy but it is not always helpful in guiding pupils towards better learning. For example, teachers do not pin point exactly where pupils have misunderstood key concepts, skills or knowledge.

Governance has not improved since previous visit. Governors have been slow to implement all of the changes required from the previous inspection, particularly in relation to improving the effectiveness of governance. With the support of the local authority, the governing body has undertaken the recommended external review of governance. It is unacceptable that an action plan has not been written as recommended in the review of July 2014. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity about the way forward and this is hindering the school's improvement. Governors have ensured that the school's work to keep pupils safe meet the statutory requirements in place at the time of my visit.

The outcome of this visit will be discussed with the Regional Director and may have an impact on the timing of the next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority is providing a level of support that is appropriate to the school's need. Two reviews of the school's leadership systems have correctly shown that the

level of support required in school year will need to increase if the school is to become good. Quite rightly, the local authority is considering making full use of its statutory powers to secure rapid improvement in governance and in the quality of education provided by the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector