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7 October 2014

Mrs Claire Spinks  
Headteacher  
Wharton CofE Primary School  
Greville Drive  
Winsford  
Cheshire  
CW7 3EP

Dear Mrs Spinks

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Wharton CofE Primary School, Cheshire West and Chester**

Following my visit to your school on 6 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 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:

- review the action plan to ensure that strategies are clearly focussed on improvements in the classroom and that there are clear links to who is responsible
- develop middle leaders to ensure that they are able to provide relevant advice, support and resources to enable teachers to teach the full range of subjects with increasing confidence and effectiveness
- continue to focus on raising attainment, especially in mathematics and writing
- improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good across the school and, in particular, making sure that teachers' skills are

developed to enable them to provide greater challenge in the tasks they set

- make sure that the monitoring of teaching and provision in classrooms is accurate and robust and challenges weak practice
- make sure governors act promptly on the recommendations of the forthcoming review of governance.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, the Chair of the Governing Body and four other governors as well as several pupils from Year 6. A meeting was also held with the local authority school improvement adviser to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and the level of support provided. In addition, a phone conversation was held with the independent commercial school improvement partner who is also working with the school. The school's development plan, self evaluation, monitoring reports and other documentation, which you provided, were evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with you focussed on the teaching of mathematics across the school.

## **Context**

There have been some significant recent changes. Senior leadership has been restructured and now comprises of yourself and three assistant headteachers. Three new teaching staff have started since September. The teaching assistant workforce has been reduced in size and many of their responsibilities been revised. Two new governors have also been appointed.

## **Main findings**

Although some improvements have been made and attainment has improved at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading, there has been a decline in mathematics and little change in writing. Overall boys attain less well than girls except in mathematics. Attainment overall continues to lag behind national averages. There are inconsistencies in teaching across classes and, as a result, pupils make mixed progress across the school. This has been further complicated by a legacy of inaccurate assessment in previous years. Currently, the rate of progress being made by the school in order to become good is too slow.

The action plan does address the weaknesses identified in the recent inspection but does not identify in sufficient detail how classroom practice is to be improved. There is too much emphasis on monitoring and processes often linked to assessment, which, although valid and useful, do not address the fundamentals of classroom practice and how this is to be improved. For example, pupil progress meetings may identify which pupils are falling behind in their work and progress targets may be set as a result but these will not be achieved unless appropriate and challenging tasks

are set by the teacher. The plan also contains some anomalies. For example, all teachers short-term planning is expected to identify challenging activities by October 2014, yet the training is linked to setting challenging targets and pupils are not expected to be working on challenging activities until February 2015. Training for middle leaders tends to focus on management processes. It does not sufficiently address development and improvement in the classroom nor is it sufficiently linked to ensuring that all teachers acquire the knowledge, skills and resources to be able to teach the new national curriculum effectively and with confidence. There is also a lack of clarity as to who is specifically accountable for each planned action.

Delegation of responsibility is unclear. Improvement plans for English, mathematics and science are more specific in identifying training needs but how these are to impact on improving classroom practice is less clear. Generally, attendance on a course by a subject leader is not being disseminated effectively enough to influence and improve classroom practice.

During the learning walk with you, we looked specifically at how maths was being delivered across the curriculum. We agreed that teaching remains inconsistent across classes and in far too many lessons there is insufficient challenge. In the lower school, we observed pupils who were working independently being given occupying tasks where they coloured in number squares without thought or reason. Elsewhere, in other classes pupils who had completed their task were waiting patiently until all groups had done so. In another class, a teacher correctly identified that there were pupils who had got answers wrong to a particular mathematical calculation. These however, were pupils who were attempting to make more complicated calculations using multiples of 6 whereas most of the other pupils had taken the easy option of listing several sixes together e.g. 666 or 606 etc. These latter pupils may have got the answer correct but they were not being challenged by the teacher to be more ambitious in their choice of calculation. In too many lessons, the more able are not being sufficiently challenged and in those lessons where different tasks are being set, pupils are not always being directed to the more difficult ones quickly enough.

Discussions with governors and advisers confirmed that inconsistencies still remain in the quality of teaching from class to class. Current monitoring of teaching appears to be more positive than it is in reality.

Pupils interviewed have not noticed any significant changes in the way they are being taught apart from the fact that there have been some changes in marking and in the way they receive and are expected to give feedback. They expressed concerns about the process of self-assessment and did not see the value of doing it, perhaps reflecting that this is not yet a well established or productive routine. Although they feel that behaviour has improved, on occasions, a small number of pupils still disrupt the learning of others. This is, however, usually dealt with quickly and positively by adults.

The recent restructuring of the senior leadership team now allows you to delegate responsibilities although, as yet, this has not yet had time to impact on improving teaching and learning. Middle leadership is not yet developed and middle leaders remain unclear how to improve practice in the classroom. There is too much focus on auditing and monitoring rather than developing teachers' subject knowledge or providing appropriate resources to improve teaching and learning.

School governors are awaiting the outcome of an imminent review of governance and have agreed to implement the recommendations. There is a willingness to change and they have an understanding of the legacy of underlying issues which have prevented the school from moving forward quickly enough in the past. There is also a recognition that governors need to play a more active role in accelerating the pace of change.

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 utilises support from a private consultancy firm as well as from the local authority. Support from the local authority has, in the past, been limited and has had mixed impact. Initially, when the junior and infant schools amalgamated more support was provided to aid the transition. This had only limited success and staffing issues continued to plague the school and hamper improvement. Until recently, there has been light touch monitoring. The recent inspection report has generated more regular and intensive intervention support. Literacy and numeracy consultants have begun working with the staff and some additional financial support has also been provided. As yet, the intervention and support from all sources has not yet had sufficient impact to turn things around.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

**Her Majesty's Inspector**