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Mrs Hilary Harrison
Executive Headteacher
Woodlawn School
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West Monkseaton
Whitley Bay
Tyne and Wear
NE25 9DL

Dear Mrs Harrison

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodlawn School, North Tyneside

Following my visit to your school on 14 October 2014, 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 and your colleagues 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. However, the school should take further action to:

- accelerate the development of middle management within the school
- ensure that the areas for improvement from the previous inspection are specifically and clearly referenced in the school development plan
- ensure that all staff and governors are involved fully in contributing to, and in evaluating and monitoring the priorities and actions in the school development plan
- ensure that any further actions emerging from the completed reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium, together with any other actions resulting from governor and/or local authority visits are evidenced and responded to as aid to showing increasing capacity to bring about the improvements required.

Evidence

During the visit, I had meetings with you and the head of school, four members of the Governing Body, including the new Chair, and two officers from the local authority.

All discussions focused on the action taken since the previous inspection. I read and evaluated a range of school documentation, including the latest school improvement plan, the recent external reviews of school governance and the school's use of its pupil premium funding, the behaviour and restraint log, attendance registers, notes of visit from governors and the local authority link officer, minutes of recent governor meetings, senior leadership team meetings and the school officer group meetings; this latter group comprising of local authority officers, senior leaders and governors.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection in June, the substantive headteacher has resigned and left the school. Two other teachers also left at the end of the summer term. Two long-term supply teachers were appointed from September, along with four new teaching assistants and one new member of the administrative staff. The deputy headteacher, who was on maternity leave at the time of the previous inspection, has returned on a 0.6 work programme. The senior leadership team has been restructured, and now comprises the commissioned executive headteacher who works two a days per week in the school, a full-time seconded acting deputy headteacher from another local authority school, the 0.6 deputy headteacher and a substantive assistant headteacher. A teaching assistant co-ordinator has been appointed from within the school. Five new members have joined the governing body, including the commissioned executive headteacher. The Chair and Vice Chair, in post during the previous inspection, have formally switched roles.

Main findings

Some important actions have been taken by senior leaders and governors to address the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The two external senior leaders working in the school are helping to stabilise the senior leadership team and reaffirm the drive and leadership actions required to help the school move forward. The upskilling and restructuring of roles and responsibilities of the governing body are helping to increase its capacity to hold these senior leaders, and the school more generally, to account for the quality of education which all pupils receive. However, the middle management tier of staff is less well developed and this aspect of the school's work needs to improve more rapidly, in particular in ensuring that these staff evaluate and monitor the curriculum for continuity, challenge and progression for pupils of all ages and abilities.

The recent external reviews of governance and the school's use of the pupil premium funding have begun but have not yet been fully completed.

The school improvement plan attempts to combine school identified priorities and actions, with the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. However, there are weaknesses in this plan, which limit the ability of all staff, but especially the senior leaders, governors and the local authority to accurately assess on-going progress of all aspects over the life of the plan. There is a lack of specificity to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection, which is ineffectively blurring the key actions needed with other aspects of the school's work. Also, the role of governors and staff in contributing to, and subsequently evaluating and monitoring the success or otherwise of all priorities and actions is very limited across the entire plan.

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 local authority was already working much more closely with the school just prior to the previous inspection and it continues to do so through a school development partner and a school officer group. The combination of these two specific and regular links is effectively helping to ensure that governors and senior staff are alert to the on-going key issues for improvement. The support provided by the commissioned executive headteacher and full-time seconded acting deputy headteacher are providing valuable and effective support for staff across the school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for North Tyneside.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector