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18 November 2014

Shona Ferguson
Headteacher
Palmers Cross Primary School
Windermere Road
Tettenhall
Wolverhampton
WV6 9DF

Dear Ms Ferguson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Palmers Cross Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 17 November 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.

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:

- sharpen action planning by making obvious the link between each planned action and the difference it will make to individual and/or groups of pupils' learning
- work with the local authority in order to strengthen the skills of the middle leaders

- make sure that actions to raise standards in writing include the precise teaching of grammar, punctuation and spelling
- provide further training for teachers and teaching assistants so that all become skilled in teaching phonics as well as comprehension and more advanced skills such as inference and deduction
- put in place the interim executive board as a matter of urgency.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, leaders of English, mathematics and science. I also met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. In addition, I spoke with a Local Leader of Education who is providing support to school leaders. I made brief visits to classes and looked at documentation, including information about pupils' attainment and progress. The school action plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection the local authority has sought to replace the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB). At the time of the visit these plans were at a very early stage of development and the school is without any strategic oversight.

Main findings

Your plans show clearly when you are introducing improvements and you include criteria against which you can measure the progress made. However, these criteria are not specific enough to enable leaders and governors to measure improvement. For example plans have 'improving questioning skills' as a task but do not specify which skills need to be improved for which subject.

The plan does not show clearly enough how and when all staff will contribute to improvements. In particular, the role of the subject leaders in helping to monitor provision is not clear enough to secure better achievement for pupils. For example, the plan does not set any questions that you and other leaders will ask to test the impact of any actions taken. This would help focus everyone's mind on the most important issues.

Although the frequency of your monitoring through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work has increased it does not focus sufficiently on the attainment and progress made by different groups of pupils. As a result, monitoring is not effective in helping teachers to identify groups of pupils not making good progress in lessons and over time.

The teaching of reading and writing is not organised well enough to ensure that pupils learn as much as they can. Changes to the way writing is taught have not been sufficient to ensure pupils in all classes make rapid progress. Although there

has been an increased emphasis on helping pupils develop their writing skills by providing more opportunities to write for different purposes, teaching does not focus well enough on developing pupils' knowledge of language rules. Work in pupils' writing books shows that, the work for all pupils and in particular, more-able pupils is not challenging enough. On occasions, teachers do not show pupils the best way of improving their writing quickly. As a result, pupils struggle and continue to make the same errors in their work.

You are aware that reading sessions to develop pupils' wider reading skills, do not ensure that pupils are reading widely or are exposed to the rich diversity of good quality children's fiction and non-fiction books. Evidence from pupils' group reading journals show that pupils are not set work at the correct level and this slows their progress. These journals also show that teachers do not mark this work as carefully as they do pupils' other work; this also restricts the progress that some pupils make.

Further work is needed to ensure that:

- pupils have access to good quality reading books both in the library and in classrooms
- leaders develop a whole school approach to the teaching of reading so that all staff are clear about the strategies they should use, particularly when teaching early reading skills
- pupils are encouraged to read regularly and often, including to suitably trained adults in school, so that they have more opportunities to practise and develop their skills.

Teachers' marking is an area of improvement that is benefiting from training and improved individual feedback to staff. Teachers are also learning from good practice in marking in other schools. In order to speed up improvements you should make sure that teachers are identifying the correct next step in pupils' learning.

Plans to secure effective leadership must be developed as a matter of urgency. Middle and senior leaders are either very new to the role or lack the experience needed. It was evident from my discussions during the visit that these leaders require further training to enable them to develop the necessary skills to check the quality of teaching in sufficient detail and to help teachers become more effective.

A review of governance found that it was not fit for purpose. Consequently, the local authority has been granted permission from the Secretary of State for Education to replace the governing body with an interim executive board. At present you are without a functioning governing body. In view of this, I will return for a second visit sometime in the summer term to look at the effectiveness of governance in more detail.

External support

The local authority provides substantial and timely support for the school through its consultants and a Local Leader of Education and a Teaching School. There are regular monitoring visits and detailed reviews of the school's performance through direct inspection. Officers acted quickly to remove the governing body after a review found that governance was not fit for purpose.

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

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Wordsworth
Her Majesty's Inspector

cc Local authority