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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 9 January 2015, 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 second 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:

- improve pupils' access to quality books and library resources in order to nurture a greater love of reading. In addition, home reading needs to be encouraged and monitored with more rigour.
- consolidate the improvements being made by subject leaders in developing teachers' subject knowledge and confidence to enable them to teach good quality lessons across the full range of subjects.

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 3 and 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 discussions were held with subject leaders in mathematics, geography, history and art. The school's development plan and a range of other documentation, including pupil attainment and progress data, subject leaders' development plans and progress reports which you provided, were evaluated. In addition, during a learning walk with you we observed teaching across a wide range of subjects.

Context

Currently, three teachers are on extended absence and their classes are being by covered by temporary staff. One new parent governor has been appointed and two other vacancies on the governing body are due to be filled shortly. The school day has been restructured to enable greater flexibility in teaching a broad and balanced curriculum. Subjects are now being taught discretely.

Main findings

There has been a very positive transformation since my previous visit in October and a great deal has been achieved. There has been a concerted effort from teachers and governors to turn things around and make a real difference to the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school. The action plan has been revised and is now clear and succinct and is sharply focussed on specific improvements in the classroom. Weak teaching has been challenged rigorously and as a result pupils expressed very positive opinions about the changes taking place. 'We are now learning more and understanding more' and 'work is now more challenging' were just two of the comments made. They were especially pleased with the way in which the school day has been restructured and identified that 'the slightly shorter lessons mean we work harder and get more work done'. They also felt that the change to teaching subjects discretely was 'a good thing since we are now clear about what we are learning in each subject'.

The negative attainment trend is being reversed and standards are improving particularly in mathematics, which was seen to be a weakness during my previous visit. There is increased rigour in the monitoring of pupil progress and current school data suggest that pupils will attain improved outcomes in the summer tests.

Change has not been easy, but you and your governors have not shirked from dealing with staffing issues and making important changes to the organisation of the school. Staff absence has been managed well to ensure that the continuity of learning for pupils has been maintained. Replacement teachers have fitted well into the new school culture. There has been a very real and positive change in the atmosphere around the school. Staff morale is much improved. There is a more positive outlook among staff and those that I talked to spoke with real enthusiasm about the improvements being made and how they were enjoying teaching much

more than previously. There is now a 'buzz' around the school and a 'can do culture' which is fuelling the improvements which are taking place.

During the learning walk with you there was clear evidence in lessons of increased expectation and challenge. On my previous visit I was critical of the low level work in mathematics. The school has since focussed on developing pupils' problem solving skills and the work being set was developing pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts which they were able to apply to ever more complex problems. A majority of pupils interviewed now identified mathematics as their favourite subject. This is perhaps the best testimony to the improvements being made in this subject. There is also much more rigour in the teaching of the full range of subjects. Pupils are now developing and using good subject specific vocabulary and there is clear evidence to show that writing is being developed across subjects and not just in English lessons. I saw pupils fully involved in their learning, not afraid to make mistakes and enjoying the challenges being set.

The school recognises that although there is a clear sign of overall improvement some aspects of school life still need further work and investment. For example, the school lacks the library and book resources to nurture a love of reading for all pupils. The monitoring of reading, especially home reading, lacks the rigour with which other aspects of the curriculum have been tackled. Pupils identified that the choice of fiction books for reading was limited and did not always suit all tastes.

Subject leadership is driving through many of the improvements. Subject responsibilities have been restructured and all subject leaders now have a specific subject improvement target identified in their performance management. Subject leaders have completed action plans, most of which focus on specific improvements in the classroom and are centred around building up teachers' confidence and skills to enable them to teach the full range of subjects competently. Good use is being made of links with subject associations and the resources they provide. Subject leader reports clearly identify the improvements being initiated; for example the use of sketchbooks in art is now commonplace; in PE pupils identified that they enjoyed the fact that they were constantly active and 'were moving around every minute'; and in geography there is good evidence to show that maps are being used more regularly to develop map reading skills. Teachers are now outward looking and subject leaders have taken the opportunities offered to attend subject specific courses to improve their own expertise and enable them to disseminate this to their colleagues. Teachers are more open in asking subject leaders for advice and the school is well placed to deliver the new national curriculum with increasing effectiveness and confidence. Very good use is being made of links with other schools and the sharing of good practice is now more common. Senior leaders were also observed providing effective classroom support for colleagues, especially those new to the school.

School governors have acted on the recommendations of their recent review of governance and there has been some restructuring of responsibilities. New

appointments are being made which fill skill gaps. Governors are regular visitors to the school and provide good support to senior leaders. There is an on-going professional dialogue and more incisive and challenging questioning, for example around the use of funding for disadvantaged pupils.

External support

The school is making very effective use of a range of outside support, including that provided by the local authority. Very good links have been established with Flixton Junior School in Trafford which has been instrumental in leading to improvements in the learning environment and in the development of middle leaders. In addition, the local authority has provided some intensive consultant support especially for the Early Years Foundation Stage, English and mathematics. The progress of the school is also regularly monitored by local authority officers.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector