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Ms Lisa Biggin
Headteacher
Ayresome Primary School
Worcester Street
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North Yorkshire
TS1 4NT

Dear Ms Biggin

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Ayresome Primary School, Middlesbrough

Following my visit to your school on 29 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 November 2013. 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 last section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- commission an external review of governance once the formal process of reconstitution is complete so that the effectiveness of the newly formed governing body can be evaluated fully.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior and middle leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the school action plan, documents relating to the performance of staff and the most recent information about pupils' progress. You also accompanied me on a visit to each classroom to observe the quality of teaching and speak to pupils informally about their learning.

Context

There have been considerable changes to leadership and staffing since the November 2013 inspection. A new headteacher, a former National Leader of Education, was appointed in September 2014 after the retirement of the previous post holder at the end of the summer term. Five teachers and a teaching assistant also left the school at this time. A further two teachers left at the end of December 2014 and two others have informed the headteacher they will be leaving or stepping down from their posts by the end of March 2015. Replacements have been sought quickly; additional teachers have already been recruited to fill the vacancies. Supply teachers are currently covering the long-term absence of two substantive members of staff.

The senior leadership team has been reorganised and middle leaders for English, mathematics and science have been appointed in the last two months. The governing body is undergoing a process of reconstitution. This will be completed by the end of May 2015.

Main findings

The journey to becoming a good or better school has been far from smooth. You have had to work swiftly and decisively since your appointment to review the position of the school and build a staff team around you that has the potential to support a more rapid drive for improvement. You quickly identified the challenges presented by some weak teaching and standards that had declined sharply. Nevertheless, in the last four months, as a result of your determined leadership and thorough understanding of school improvement processes, the school is now back on track – the quality of teaching is improving and pupils are making faster progress.

Your 'root and branch' review of all aspects of the school's work has opened the eyes of both staff and governors to how far the school still has to travel before it can provide a consistently good quality of education for its pupils. Importantly, everyone stands with you, shoulder-to-shoulder, working at speed to undertake precisely what needs to be done in order to lift the overall effectiveness of the school. All leaders, at whatever level, speak of feeling trusted and empowered to contribute to the improvement agenda.

Weaker teaching is being eradicated quickly through the constant checking of classroom practice and the effective use of coaching plans where teaching falls short of what is expected. In a short space of time, you have set out high expectations, raised the bar of what is deemed acceptable and brought much needed consistency to school systems. However, much remains to be done before the next section 5 inspection. All staff and governors are acutely aware that the journey to becoming 'awesome at Ayresome' may take longer than originally anticipated.

Governors rightly recognise that they have been too accepting in the past. The Chair of Governors acknowledges that while some challenging questions were focused on the areas of greatest concern, the governing body did not have the correct mechanisms in place to seek first-hand evidence and verify what governors were being told. A recent skills analysis has already revealed where further training, such as around data analysis, is needed to develop expertise and build confidence. As the governing body reconstitutes to become a smaller, more sharply-focused group, governors should seek an external review of their practice, to highlight where further improvements are necessary.

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

As a former National Leader of Education, you have a strong network of professionals from which the school can now draw support. Constant reflection and analysis, through 'fresh eyes', is at the heart of your self-evaluation process and a number of external consultants have helped to hone your approaches for maximum impact. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving and pupils' progress is beginning to accelerate.

Importantly, the local authority have been included as members of your review team, for example, working alongside governors during their raising achievement committee meetings. Given the unexpected decline in standards at the end of the summer term, an accurate baseline of pupils' achievements will be crucial. The local authority has planned external validation of all statutory assessments for the end of the year.

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

Yours sincerely

Lee Owston

Her Majesty's Inspector