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Ms Brenda Fyrth
Headteacher
Thomlinson Junior School
The Goose Market
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Wigton
Cumbria
CA7 9PG

Dear Ms Fyrth

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thomlinson Junior School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 24 February 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:

- ensure teaching is consistently good across all classes and is especially focussed on closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils
- develop the role of all subject leaders so that they begin to show clear evidence of impact in learning in the subjects they are responsible for
- complete an audit of governor skills to ensure relevant training is provided to enable them to be more confident in challenging school managers in the progress the school is making towards improving outcomes for pupils.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with yourself, the Chair of the Governing Body as well as group of pupils from Years 4 and 6. A meeting was also held with your new local authority adviser and another with the National Leader of Education, who is supporting the school, to discuss the action taken since the last monitoring visit in October and the level of support currently being provided. Future support was also discussed. The school's development plan, self-evaluation and other documentation, which you, or the National Leader of Education provided, was also evaluated. In addition, a learning walk with you focussed on reading across the school and how effectively this was being delivered. Additional sessions, principally in English, were observed jointly with the National Leader of Education later in the day.

Context

Since my last visit in October, two newly qualified teachers have been recruited to replace a teacher who has left the school and another who is absent long term. A new local authority adviser has also been appointed to monitor and provide support for the school.

Main findings

Although improving, the school continues to be a work in progress. Most of the necessary management structures which ensure the smooth and efficient running of a school are now in place. However, the pace of improvement in the classroom needs to be increased if the school is to be judged good at its next inspection. You, as the headteacher, have managed to change the culture and attitudes to learning around the school. During our learning walk to observe reading, it was noticeable that lessons were well focussed and the atmosphere in classrooms was more purposeful than on my previous visit. A greater academic rigour has been added to the culture of care for which the school has been well known for previously. There is improved rigour and structure to much of the teaching in the morning sessions, especially in English. Work in other subjects, especially in the afternoon sessions, is less well organised or delivered with the same confidence. There is a clear understanding that further work needs to be done to raise the quality of teaching and learning in these lessons.

Standards are improving and current school data suggest that increasing numbers of pupils are beginning to make more than expected progress in reading, writing and to a lesser extent in mathematics. In part, this is due to improved teaching in these subjects but also to more focussed intervention for those pupils in danger of falling behind. Teachers' use of data is now more secure. Systems for monitoring pupil progress are more accurate and informative. This is especially so in Year 6 where this analysis is supported by regular half-termly pupil progress meetings. In other

classes, these meetings occur once a term. This could result in a longer delay in identifying underperforming pupils in these other classes. This is especially critical as the progress of disadvantaged pupils does not yet match that of other pupils across all year groups.

During my learning walks with yourself and the National Leader of Education, who is supporting the school, we noted that pupils' attitudes to learning were more positive than during my previous visit. Pupils engaged readily with the content of lessons and there was frequent evidence of an unrelenting focus on developing language and vocabulary. It was very pleasing to observe pupils readily reaching for dictionaries to check spelling or the meaning of words. Pupils are becoming more familiar with words and how words are used and changed. There was no evidence of disruption during the lessons we visited, however in discussions with pupils some minor disturbances do occasionally occur and disrupt learning for some of them. Pupils expressed concern that they were not suitably supervised at breaktimes and lunchtimes when more frequent incidents of bullying, name calling and over robust play sometimes occur. A lack of suitable resources and planned activities for outdoor play appears to be, in part, responsible for this.

Pupils interviewed have noticed some improvements in lessons. They are now familiar with routines in guided reading sessions and these are productive and well managed. They were positive about the new library which has recently been re-organised and refurbished. They are beginning to use it on a regular basis but the stock of books is limited, especially in the range of fiction books suitable for the older pupils. Pupils also considered that some of the work in lessons, other than English and mathematics, continues to be mundane and uninteresting.

Marking and feedback has improved, especially in English, but inconsistencies still remain across other subjects. There is also emerging evidence to show that where the marking is informative and constructive pupils are beginning to act on this advice to improve their work.

Leadership of English and mathematics is more structured and better managed than in other subjects. Leaders have a clearer understanding of their role. Planning in these two subjects is monitored regularly and scrutiny of books and observation of lessons is beginning to provide these subject leaders with a clearer picture of which aspects are being taught well and which need further support and development. The school acknowledges that leadership of other subjects remains, on the whole, at an early stage of development.

The governing body has been restructured with governors being given specific individual responsibilities. They are kept informed of the progress the school is making through monthly strategic improvement meetings. However, there is less evidence to show they are providing sufficient challenge to enable improvement to become more rapid. Some governors are still relatively inexperienced and require further training.

Although improvements are becoming more evident, current self evaluation is over-optimistic and greater consistency is required across the school in all classrooms and all subjects before the school can be judged to be solidly good.

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 receives the majority of its support from the six schools who are part of the local school to school alliance, and especially from the National Leader of Education from Dearham Primary School. This support has been instrumental in ensuring that management structures are better embedded and that middle leaders are being supported and developed in their roles. Initial signs of the impact of this support are positive but there is still a need for greater consistency and more evidence of improvement in the classroom especially in outcomes for all groups of pupils. The school has received very limited support from the local authority in the past. The recent appointment of a new local authority adviser potentially signals a more active involvement. A schedule of regular visits and a whole school review is planned for the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector