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Mr Paul Lonsdale
Headteacher
Dene House Primary School
Manor Way
Peterlee
County Durham
SR8 5RL

Dear Mr Lonsdale

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Dene House Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 February 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in December 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated. Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) visited lessons, spoke to pupils, scrutinised workbooks and reviewed a range of documentation, including pupil progress data. HMI also read the external view of the school's use of the pupil premium (additional government money) produced by the Shine Teaching School Alliance.

Context

There are no contextual changes since the last inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leaders acted speedily to secure support from Shiremoor Primary School, a National Teaching School, following the recent inspection. Staff from the teaching school observed teaching in Key Stage 1 and gave full feedback to individual teachers. As a result, teaching assistants are being used to better effect in some year groups and pupils are making faster progress in their acquisition of phonics, the sounds that letters make.

Teachers' marking is still not leading to quicker pupil progress, because it lacks sufficient challenge and pupils do not get a chance to respond to marking on a regular basis. Pupils' handwriting and presentation are not improving quickly enough, because pupils are not given enough opportunities to improve and practise their skills. However, some recently introduced initiatives, for example, paired one-to-one reading in Year 2, are leading to pupils' increased fluency and understanding in reading.

The local authority has an increasingly accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development through the work of the school scrutiny group. Teaching has improved because of the education development advisers' insightful feedback to individual teachers following a scrutiny of pupils' English and mathematics workbooks. Provision in the early years, especially teachers' planning, is improving as a result of training provided by the local authority.

Middle leaders are having a more positive impact on the work of the school. The 'progression in writing' document produced by the leader for English is helping to address the current weaknesses in writing in all year groups. A new 'calculations policy', essential to address the demands of the new National Curriculum for mathematics, remains a work in progress and will be checked by HMI during the next monitoring inspection. Middle leaders are much more knowledgeable about the standards pupils should reach and the progress pupils should be making throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. As a result of recent training from the local authority, they have a better understanding of how children are assessed in the early years. However, both senior and middle leaders do not yet have a clear understanding of the progress of individual children and different groups of children in the early years, because data analysis has not yet been undertaken.

Governors are proactive and take their challenge role to the school very seriously. They are well informed and now hold senior and middle leaders to account during regular scrutiny group meetings and monitoring visits.

The external review of the school's use of the pupil premium, which was recommended at the time of the recent inspection, took place in early January. The resulting report was received by the school on the day before HMI's first monitoring inspection. HMI will review the impact of this report during the next monitoring inspection.

The school's action plan requires further development. There is not enough separation between who will carry out improvement actions, who will monitor the progress against each action and who will evaluate the impact of the actions, especially the actions in relation to the early years. In addition, the lack of numerical milestones makes it very difficult for progress to be judged accurately, again, especially in the early years.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Corporate Director: Children's and Adults' Services for Durham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector