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Ms Davindar Bhalla
Starks Field Primary School
167 Church Street
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Dear Ms Bhalla

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Starks Field Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 18 June 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in April 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors have not had sufficient time to implement all of the planned actions that are sharply focused on bringing about improvement. Actions introduced have therefore not been effective to tackle all areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- Ensure that all actions outlined in the school development plan are implemented without further delay.
- Enable senior leaders to develop their strategic vision for the school by appointing and retaining key subject leaders to take responsibility for coordinating English, mathematics and science.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, and a group of pupils, two teaching assistants and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was held with the Chair of the Governing Body. The school improvement plan and actions taken since May 2015 were evaluated. A number of other documents were also taken into consideration and included, pupils' attendance records, monitoring of teaching, minutes of governors' meetings and recent policy statements on developing teaching. A scrutiny of pupils' work was also carried out. You took me on a tour of the school to see pupils at work.

Context

Since the previous inspection, there has been no change in staffing. However, five teachers, including the assistant headteacher with responsibility for mathematics, will be leaving at the end of the summer term. The school expects to appoint four new teachers before the end of the current term. A new assistant headteacher has been appointed and will take up the substantive post in September 2015. The new assistant headteacher will have responsibility for leading Key Stage 2 and managing English, until a subject leader is appointed. The interim deputy headteacher, who works in the school part-time, is responsible for overseeing the pupil premium and attendance. This arrangement ends in July 2015 when it will be reviewed.

Main findings

Discussions with you and other senior staff indicated that you are all aware that the school needs to make rapid progress. You all see this as only option for the school to secure a 'good' judgement at the next section 5 inspection. You are aware that without this positive outcome, the school could be in a category of concern. You all reported that the recent inspection has increased awareness of the responsibility all staff have for pupils' achievement.

Discussions suggest that previously, the school was not sharply focused on pupils' rates of progress. Consequently, the inspection judgement was not expected and this affected staff morale. Since the school opened, all key senior staff were not appointed until this term. Difficulties with recruitment and retention persist and has resulted in senior staff having increased workloads. This is because there are no permanent key middle leaders with responsibilities for English, mathematics and science; senior leaders lead these subjects. As a result, they have had too little time to manage all tasks rigorously particularly in relation to challenging staff and holding them to account for pupils' progress. Additionally, staff were not always given clear messages about the need for pupils to make better progress.

You have all indicated that the culture of the school is now changing. You have also expressed your determination to work together to make further improvements quickly. As a result, new policies on developing teaching and a lesson planning format were introduced this term. Staff now know that expectations are higher and consistency of practice is expected to underpin their work. However, teaching assistants are not involved in planning. You all reported that there is more challenge in lessons. Pupils stated that this was so but they also noted that that was not consistent. Work in pupils' books show that the quality of marking is improving but inconsistencies remain. Teachers do not always explain how pupils can develop their work. Changes made this term and are underdeveloped. Your monitoring records show that consistency is lacking in relation to a number of areas such as challenge, marking and expectations. Nevertheless, the new deputy headteacher is working well with other senior leaders to develop monitoring of teaching and use of assessment information. More work and training are planned. The challenge for the school is to appoint and retain key subject leaders so that senior leaders can have more time to provide strong strategic

direction. The development plan is comprehensive and provides clear goals for the school to achieve. There is a sharp focus on pupil progress which is linked closely to teaching. However, the improvement plan is still being rolled out and it is too early to evaluate the full impact of actions that were introduced this term. The school expects higher results in the national tests but evidence was not examined during the monitoring visit.

Since the last inspection, attendance is much improved and was broadly average for primary schools. You have all been more proactive in communicating expectations to parents. Partnership work with the education welfare officer is also better. The challenge for the school is to sustain the current improvement. However, stringent actions have not been taken and neither is there a strategy in place to remove pupils from the register when they stop attending.

The governing body has a clear understanding of the priorities for the school. In particular, they know that all leaders are the driving force behind school improvement. Governors know that there is still much more to do and are using the school improvement plan to keep the school's work under review.

External support

The local authority is working closely with you and your staff by providing continuous challenge. Termly review meetings with senior officers and the School Improvement Adviser suggest that the school is very clear about the time factor to develop and sustain effective practices. Links with other schools have been brokered and have been helpful in developing, for example marking. The associate headteacher works well with you as a mentor. The support from the literacy and numeracy consultants is contributing to developing better practices but there is still much more to do. The local authority is very clear that the only outcome expected is 'good' at the next inspection. Consequently, the challenge will increase next term when the Chief Executive joins the review meetings.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector