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6 July 2015

Mrs Shirley Clement  
Headteacher  
Croftway Primary Academy  
William Street  
Blyth  
Northumberland  
NE24 2HP

Dear Mrs Clement

**Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Croftway Primary Academy, Northumberland**

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 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 March 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the school's improvement plan is sharply focused on actions which will effectively tackle the key priorities identified at the last inspection
- set measurable long-term targets and short-term milestones for pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching so that leaders and governors can keep track on the performance of the academy
- increase the rigour of checks on the quality of the academy's work, including the quality of teaching, so that leaders and governors can precisely measure and evaluate the impact of the academy's actions.

The Multi Academy Trust (MAT) and the local governing body should take immediate action to:

- work with senior leaders to agree a programme of external support which will challenge Croftway Academy to become a good school.

## **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, middle leaders, a group of staff, the Chair and Vice-chair and other members of the local governing body and representatives of the MAT to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's action plan and scrutinised other documents, including the school's evaluation of its performance, reports from the school's improvement partner and records of monitoring of teaching. I toured the school with the deputy headteacher and looked at a small sample of pupils' work.

## **Context**

An additional teaching assistant has been appointed from an agency on a temporary basis since the inspection.

## **Main findings**

Leaders have created an action plan to take account of the findings of the previous inspection. While the plan includes some appropriate actions to help the school improve, it does not focus sharply enough on the key aspects of teaching and leadership. Responsibilities and timescales for checking on the effectiveness of actions are not clear. The plan lacks long-term targets for improving pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, as well as shorter milestones which will allow leaders and governors to check on the performance of the school on a regular basis.

Leaders are not measuring the impact of the actions that they take. For example, the school has introduced a programme to improve pupils' spelling. Although this has now been in place for 12 weeks, leaders have failed to check on the difference that this is making to pupils' achievement. As a result, they are unable to identify whether the programme is delivered consistently well in all classes and whether it is effectively addressing the issues with pupils' spelling skills.

Some actions taken by leaders to improve the school have been effective. The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has embraced the messages from the last inspection. Staff have planned problem-solving opportunities in the outdoor area which challenge pupils to think deeply about their learning. They have restructured the day to maximise the effect that key workers have on children's learning. Consequently, the proportion of children reaching the expected level at the end of the Reception year has increased and the gap between the achievement of boys and girls has reduced.

Senior leaders have introduced opportunities for staff to share their teaching practice. A 'lesson study' project is enabling teachers to work together to improve progress for identified groups of children. Subject leaders are working with colleagues from other schools in the Multi Academy Trust to plan improvements to their curriculum areas. Staff are very positive about these opportunities, although it is too early to discern any significant impact on the quality of teaching from this work.

Leaders have increased the frequency with which they check on the quality of teaching by visiting lessons and looking at pupils' work. However, feedback provided to teachers shows that they are not given clear messages about how well pupils make progress in individual lessons or over time. The areas for development identified for teachers are not rigorous enough to secure essential improvements in the quality of teaching.

Leaders have reviewed the marking and feedback policy since the inspection. While they have communicated their expectations to staff, leaders recognise that they have not checked regularly to ensure that the policy is being implemented. Pupils' books show that the quality of marking is inconsistent in a number of classes and that it is having limited impact on pupils' learning.

You have provided opportunities for staff to observe demonstration lessons in reading and have introduced a new programme of teaching to support reading and writing. Staff are enthusiastic about the impact that this has had on the quality of their guided reading sessions with pupils. While your current tracking of pupils' achievement indicates signs of improvement in some year groups for reading and writing, there are some year groups where the rate of pupils' progress has slowed.

Additional training for teaching assistants has enabled the introduction of new catch-up programmes for reading and for the development of children's speech and language skills. Teaching assistants are now being deployed more carefully to target groups of pupils whose progress is not yet good. While leaders are keeping a track on pupils' individual progress, they have not analysed this information to make an informed decision on whether the programmes are improving pupils' progress rapidly enough.

An external review of governance has been conducted which robustly identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the local governing body. Governors now have an appropriate plan in place to improve their effectiveness. They have begun to ask more challenging questions of school leaders, but recognise that they do not yet have the skills to determine whether leaders' responses to those questions are good enough. Governors have requested a training budget from the Multi-Academy Trust to enable them to address this issue.

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

### **External support**

Tensions exist between the local governing body, the Multi Academy Trust and the senior leadership of the school. There is confusion over the boundaries and responsibilities associated with a MAT. Senior leaders and the local governing body are unclear about their options to seek advice and support beyond the Trust.

Since the previous inspection, the MAT has formed a committee to challenge the school to improve the quality of teaching and to raise pupils' achievement. However, the local governing body and the senior leadership have found this challenge difficult to accept. Directors of the Trust have recognised that working relationships are not currently productive enough to have a positive effect on the performance of Croftway Academy. Very recently, they have taken the positive step of appointing two independent directors who will be able to provide a new and objective perspective on the challenge and support offered to the school.

The MAT has provided the services of a school improvement partner who has challenged the school and identified key issues such as the inconsistencies in teachers' application of the marking policy. However, the effectiveness of support and challenge has been hampered by the difficult relationship which exists between the Trust and the academy. Governors, MAT directors and senior leaders must urgently co-operate to determine and agree a robust programme of challenge and support in order to improve outcomes for the pupils attending Croftway.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Northumberland and as below.

Yours sincerely

Claire Brown

### **Her Majesty's Inspector**

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority – including where the school is an academy
- For academies [[CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:CausingConcern.SCHOOLS@education.gsi.gov.uk)]