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Mrs Karen Porteous
Executive Headteacher
Whitecotes Primary School
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Dear Mrs Porteous

Serious weaknesses second monitoring inspection of Whitecotes Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 14 June 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 that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the executive headteacher and a senior leader, the chair of the governing body, representatives of the local authority and members of staff with responsibilities for assessment, numeracy and the early years. I toured the school, visiting all classrooms briefly, accompanied by the executive headteacher, looking at the pupils' work and holding discussions with pupils.

Context

Since my previous visit, you have replaced the executive headteacher who was then in charge. An associate headteacher is also supporting the school. The substantive headteacher, acting headteacher, who is also the deputy headteacher, and other members of staff with leadership responsibilities have been absent from the school

long term. Several members of the teaching staff have left the school and many teaching posts have been filled on a temporary basis. It is anticipated that the school will convert to become an academy on 1 September 2016. The main purpose of this monitoring visit was to look at the impact of leadership and management in dealing with the issues that led to the school being judged to have serious weaknesses.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The school has experienced a very difficult and turbulent period in recent months, involving significant instability in senior leadership and staffing. That instability has had a marked impact on the school's progress and means that it has not made enough progress towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation, within the timescale envisaged, since the previous monitoring visit.

The difficulties that the school has experienced have hampered the implementation of the action plans prepared by the time of the previous monitoring visit. The plans proposed reasonable and practical changes, but the intentions have not been realised.

As the issues in leadership have bitten, core management functions have not been carried out consistently. The school has lacked direction and the staff have not received sufficient support and feedback to help them to make the improvements required securely.

The staff have been kept up to date with safeguarding training and information and understand the school's procedures for dealing with any concerns. They do not know currently, however, who the named persons responsible for safeguarding are – another thing that has been affected by the leadership difficulties.

You have acted quickly to get the school back on track since you were appointed as executive headteacher, but have been in that role for 11 days only at the time of this visit. Consequently, the necessary clarity of purpose and consistent, focused leadership that is required has only just begun to re-emerge. You have, rightly, made it your top priority to bring about rapid improvements in the quality of teaching.

The quality of teaching is still too variable. Too often, the teaching does not build progressively on the things that the pupils have learned previously. The teachers have not been enabled to get to grips with changes that have been introduced. As a result, the teaching does not extend or expand the pupils' learning sufficiently to secure good progress. That is apparent in the pupils' written work and in their responses in lessons. The pupils show a willingness to learn and interest in the topics chosen by the teachers, but these are not capitalised upon consistently.

The confidence of leaders and of the core of staff remaining at the school is returning. The staff are evidently focused on making the necessary improvements to the quality of teaching, to a greater extent than has been the case over the last few months. They have been successful in making some improvements in the quality of

teaching. The assessment coordinator has compiled useful information about the pupils' achievement. The information provides a sound basis for discussions among the staff about the impact of the teaching. The information shows that there have been successful improvements in the teaching of mathematics and phonics and in the early years.

The available information about the pupils' achievement shows that such improvements are not consistent. The improvements that were apparent at the end of key stage 2 in 2015 have not been sustained. The pupils' achievement in the early years and at key stage 1 declined in 2015, although the current information held by the school shows that it has improved this year so far.

The governing body has acted quickly on each occasion to deal with the leadership and staffing difficulties as they have emerged. It has been caught out by a series of events that could not have been foreseen. It has acted determinedly and shown initiative, seeking appropriate external help, but has been unable to secure consistent leadership at the school over recent months. It has taken action aimed at securing the long-term improvement of the school by managing the process for the school to become an academy.

The local authority has, equally, not given up in its efforts to find solutions to the school's difficulties, despite setbacks. It has responded promptly to requests from the governing body, raised the level of support provided to, or brokered for, the school and restructured its approach in response to the emerging situation. The positive effect of its support is apparent in the improvements in the early years and in the teaching of mathematics and phonics. It is also assisting the governing body in managing the transition to the school becoming an academy.

In summary, there has been no lack of effort on anyone's part. Appropriate actions have been taken at various points in time, but unforeseeable difficulties over several months have proved difficult to resolve. The result has been that, overall, the school has not made enough progress since the previous monitoring visit.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgement was made:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the director of children's services for Derbyshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Clive Moss
Her Majesty's Inspector