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Alison Michalska
Director of Children's Services
East Riding of Yorkshire Local Authority
County Hall
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Dear Mrs Michalska

East Riding of Yorkshire local authority – focused inspections – 13 to 22 May 2013

Thank you for our telephone discussion on 12 May 2013 during which I notified you of the focused inspections for the East Riding of Yorkshire. It was a good opportunity to build on our previous meeting on 21 March 2013 regarding Ofsted's new regional structure and how we might work together to further improve schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Our discussion was also helpful for me to explain the current approach Ofsted is taking with schools in particular local authority areas through focused and concentrated inspection activity. This approach, coupled with the outcomes of a telephone survey of a sample of school leaders' perceptions of the support and challenge provided by the local authority, has given Ofsted a clearer picture of educational provision in the East Riding of Yorkshire and your part in improving it.

As I explained during our telephone discussion I am writing to inform you of the outcomes of the fifteen inspections and the telephone survey carried out during the period 13 to 22 May 2013.

Outline of inspection activities

Fifteen schools were inspected including 10 primary schools and five secondary schools; two of the secondary schools have Sixth Form provision. One school was given a Notice to Improve at the previous inspection, nine of the schools were judged to be satisfactory, two were found to be good and for the three academy converter schools this was the first inspection. Of the converter academies, one of the predecessor schools was judged to be satisfactory, one to be good and one to be outstanding.

The schools were due for inspection in the academic year 2012/13 and selected to encompass a range of school types such as small schools, or voluntary aided schools.

During the inspections, Her Majesty's Inspectors gathered information on the use, quality and impact of local authority support for school improvement by asking three additional key questions of headteachers and governors:

- How well does the local authority know your school, your performance and the standards your pupils achieve?
- What measures are in place to support and challenge your school and how do these meet the needs of your school?
- What is the impact of the local authority support and challenge over time to help your school improve?

Similar questions were asked of local authority officers as is usual practice during school inspections.

A further 12 schools were surveyed by telephone during the focused inspection period. These included eight primary schools (one of which is an academy), one junior school and three secondary schools. Two of these schools were judged outstanding at their last inspection and the remaining are all good schools. Headteachers in these schools were asked the same three questions and a fourth, which reflected their status as good or outstanding schools:

- How well is the local authority making use of your school's strengths to help others improve?

These schools were selected for the survey partly because they would be expected to offer a perspective on how the local authority has used those good or outstanding schools to support others.

Inspection and survey outcomes

Of the schools inspected during the focused inspection week:

- two schools were graded as outstanding. One of these schools improved from the previous inspection judgement of good and one sustained a previous outstanding grade for overall effectiveness
- four were graded as good. All of these schools had improved since their previous inspection
- nine were judged to require improvement to become good. One of which improved having previously been judged as inadequate. Six were graded satisfactory at their previous inspection. Two declined having been previously judged as good
- no schools were placed in categories of concern.

The improvement of just over one third of the schools inspected, and the sustaining of outstanding practice in one other school gives cause for optimism and reflects well upon the hard work of the senior leaders, teachers and pupils since their last inspection. To balance this, it is a concern that two previously good schools have declined and require improvement and six of the previously satisfactory schools have not improved.

Responses to the key questions asked of those schools inspected during the focused period and those contacted by telephone were analysed. The key findings are outlined below.

Strengths

- The local authority has categorised schools following an analysis of performance data and discussions with headteachers. There are well established procedures to support schools which are judged by the local authority to cause concern.
- There are examples of effective support for schools leading to improvement as shown by the schools judged to have improved at this inspection. The good impact of local authority school improvement officers is at the heart of these examples.
- The clerking of governing body meetings is widely praised. Governors generally appreciate the local authority induction training though there are mixed feelings about the quality of governor support overall.
- Local authority financial services and support are viewed highly by many schools.
- Partnerships and collaborations, which exist in some local areas, between clusters of schools in the local authority, hold promise for the future in driving improvement. Also, headteachers provided examples of occasions where the local authority has brokered support from National, Local and Specialist Leaders in Education.

Areas for improvement

- The level of challenge for schools is variable, partly due to the reducing capacity of the local authority's resources. While schools identified by the authority as causing concern receive effective support and challenge, many other schools receive little attention. Some headteachers stated that the local authority needs to modernise its procedures and make better use of the experience of the best performing schools. The survey responses suggest that not all headteachers and governors have a clear understanding of the local authority's strategy for school improvement. In particular, a perception is that the local authority lacks challenge and aspiration for schools previously inspected and judged as good or outstanding.
- The local authority does not have a clear strategy for maximising the successful clusters and collaborations between groups of schools in some areas to ensure school improvement is effective across the authority. Several school leaders think that the local authority does not take a consistent lead in its approach to sharing the best practice and

promoting school to school support. Schools view the partnerships they have established independently, as the foremost source of good training and development. These school leaders say that this has a much greater impact on school improvement than the support and challenge provided directly by the local authority.

- Training provided by the local authority is viewed by some schools as being of variable quality. Several headteachers voiced their concerns about weak training which lacks impact. Also, training is sometimes viewed as out of date and poorly presented. As a result, some schools rarely use local authority training, preferring to `buy in' from external providers. There appears to be patches of more effective and useful training in some areas but this is too inconsistent to effectively promote school improvement across the authority.
- There was a variable response from schools for local authority Human Resources provision.

In summary, there was acknowledgement for the work the local authority was doing to support and challenge the least effective schools. Nevertheless, much more needs to be done to establish and embed a clear strategic vision for sustained school improvement across schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The local authority's response to addressing inconsistencies in the impact of school improvement strategies and the outcome of future school inspections will be followed up by Senior HMI at regular meetings with local authority officers.

I hope these observations are useful as you seek to improve the quality of education for the children and young people of the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Please pass on my thanks to the local authority officers who gave their time to talk to our inspectors. Please also do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss anything in this letter further. I am looking forward to meeting officers and members at the Performance of Schools in the East Riding of Yorkshire Review Panel when we can discuss the detailed findings of Ofsted's focused inspections.

Yours sincerely

Nick Hudson
Regional Director, North East Yorkshire and Humberside

CC: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education