

29 May 2014

Ms Joanne Hewson  
Director of Children's Services  
North East Lincolnshire  
The Western Technology Site  
Cambridge Road  
Grimsby  
DN34 5TD

**Nick Hudson**  
Regional Director, North East,  
Yorkshire & Humber

Dear Ms Hewson

**North East Lincolnshire local authority – focused inspections – 17-21  
March 2014**

Thank you for our telephone discussion on 17 March 2014 during which I notified you of the focused inspections for North East Lincolnshire. Our inspections, coupled with a telephone survey of a sample of leaders from good and outstanding schools about their perception of the support and challenge from the local authority, have enabled us to obtain a clearer picture of the education provided for pupils in North East Lincolnshire and your role in supporting and promoting improvement.

**Outline of inspection activities**

**Focused inspection**

We inspected seven schools as part of the focused inspection including:

- three primary schools
- one junior school
- one infant school and
- two secondary schools.

The focused inspections included a range of different schools reflecting the diversity of provision in the local authority.

The schools had received the following judgments at their previous inspections:

- four schools were judged to be satisfactory or requires improvement and
- three schools were judged to be good.

All of these schools were due for inspection during the academic year 2013/14.

During the inspections, information was gathered on the use, quality and impact of local authority support for school improvement by asking three key questions of headteachers, governors and local authority officers:

- 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?

### **Telephone survey**

Her Majesty's Inspectors conducted a telephone survey of a further 11 schools; four of which are judged to be outstanding and three good. Inspectors spoke to headteachers in:

- six primary schools
- one infant school
- three secondary schools; and
- one special school.

In addition to the questions noted above, these schools were asked a further question, reflecting their status as good or outstanding schools:

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

### **Inspection outcomes**

Of the schools inspected during the focused inspection period:

- one school was graded as outstanding, improving from its previous judgement of good
- three were graded as good; one improving from a previous judgment and two sustaining their previous judgements
- three were judged to require improvement; they had failed to improve on their previous inspection judgement.

It is encouraging that there has been improvement in a small number of schools; however, it is a concern that the majority of satisfactory or requires improvement schools have not improved. Overall, the number of schools requiring improvement has remained broadly the same. In addition, it is particularly worrying that the

leadership and management of schools judged as requiring improvement have similarly been judged to require improvement.

The outcomes of inspections since September 2013, including those during the focused inspection event, show that the percentage of good and better schools is significantly lower than that seen nationally and is only improving marginally. This is against a national backdrop of a more rapid rise in the percentage of good or better schools. While the number of declining schools may be small; the number which are improving is similarly small, over time the percentage of good and better schools in the authority is much lower than found nationally. This is a significant concern.

## **Survey outcomes**

### **Strengths**

- The annual analysis of school's performance data, conducted for all schools by the local authority, provides useful benchmarking information. Set against both national and local averages, schools find this helpful in their own evaluations. The strategic use of this information enables the local authority to band schools into one of four levels. In turn, this is utilised to allocate resources according to need, ensuring correct prioritisation of support and challenge to school leaders. National Leaders of Education (NLE) and Local Leaders of Education (LLE) are mostly used effectively to promote improvement in schools. In particular, they broker support from other schools including opportunities to learn from best practice. Also, NLEs and LLEs provide additional leadership capacity in schools; using their skills to improve teaching and accelerate pupils' progress.
- Local collaborations and clusters of schools, including a teaching alliance and academy trusts, provide effective peer-to-peer support. Within these groups there are opportunities for headteachers to meet and exchange information, professional training activities and sharing best practice. There is widespread appreciation of the opportunities provided through these arrangements.
- The quality of school improvement local authority advisers, who are outsourced through a service agreement with Serco, is viewed positively by those schools in receipt of this support. The responsiveness of officers, when they were contacted for additional support, is appreciated.
- Local authority services for assessment and moderation and for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are held in high regard. The impact of their work is evidenced by several schools reporting increased accuracy and confidence in assessments and improved policies and practices for SEND.
- Many schools view the local authority services for governors, clerking, human resources (HR), finance and payroll to be of good quality.

## Areas for improvement

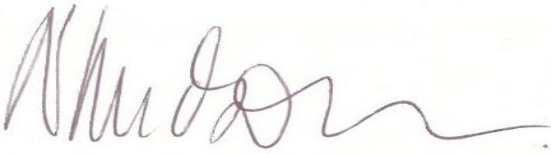
- The banding system for schools results in some inequalities. There is uneven access to local authority support and challenge. For example, not all schools in the same band are supported by the same number of days. Additionally, the heavy emphasis placed upon weaker schools results in limited resource being available for better schools who still have areas to improve. Consequently some schools view the banding system as unfair.
- Communication about the banding system is not sufficiently clear and consistent: some governors are unaware of the process or the implication for the level of support and challenge to their school.
- There is a lack of rigour to the monitoring of the performance of some schools. Monitoring evidence is often largely generated by the school; it is not consistently subject to sufficient challenge until the publication of examination results. This delay hampers timely action.
- The local authority's knowledge about the performance of some schools is heavily reliant on published school data and information received from schools. In schools judged by the local authority to be 'self-sustaining' or 'self-improving' there is usually little on-site knowledge of the school's performance and context.
- Significant staff turnover and reductions in numbers have resulted in a decline of the local authority's capacity to support school improvement. Additionally, the number of NLEs and LLEs is considered by school leaders to be too few to fully support the needs of all schools. It is not clear that LLEs are deployed strategically outside their own school.
- The number of recently appointed headteachers in the local authority is high; there is a lack of mentoring to support those new to the role.
- The impact of local authority services to bring about improvement in schools is too variable because it is reliant upon the degree of concern and the resources available. Processes to support and challenge underperforming academies are in place, but inspection evidence raises concerns about the rigour, depth and impact of these arrangements. .

In summary, there is evidence of some effective school improvement driven by the local authority. However, this is not sufficiently thorough or consistent to ensure that improvement is promoted across all schools. The expertise and experience of groups and collaborations of schools is not harnessed systematically to build capacity for improvement. The local authority does not hold schools rigorously to account for their performance. Above all, the rate of progress in schools currently judged to require improvement is too slow to ensure that the percentage of good and better schools in the local authority quickly closes the gap on the national figure. Until this is achieved children in North East Lincolnshire will continue to be poorly served.

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

Please pass on my thanks to the local authority officers who gave their time to talk to our inspectors. Do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss anything in this letter further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Nick Hudson", written in a cursive style.

Nick Hudson  
**Regional Director, North East, Yorkshire and Humber**