

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566862
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
rcowley@cfbt.com



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Mrs Eileen Martin
Headteacher
South Stanley Junior School
Tyne Road
Stanley
County Durham
DH9 6PZ

Dear Mrs Martin

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to South Stanley Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 30 January 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings of my visit. 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 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and subject leaders, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documents were scrutinised including pupils' work, information on pupils' progress, senior leaders' monitoring records, minutes of governing body meetings and reports from the local authority.

Context

Since the November 2012 inspection, one governor has been appointed to the governing body.

Main findings

The headteacher and governors show determination to improve the performance of the school and tackle weaknesses in teaching and achievement. They have ensured that the school improvement plan has been re-written with a clear focus on tackling the areas for improvement identified in the recent inspection. The plan identifies specific actions, objectives and suitable timescales. However, targets in the plan relating to pupils' progress are not specific enough to include all groups of pupils and there are no shorter-term milestones by which progress can be measured.

Senior leaders are rigorously checking on the progress pupils are making through observing lessons, checking teachers' planning and scrutinising pupils' work. Teachers are given targets to improve the quality of their teaching and these are checked on a weekly basis. Evidence in tracking files and senior leaders' records of pupil progress meetings show that teachers are now being held to account for the progress pupils' make.

Subject leaders are enthusiastic and have benefited from the modelling and coaching approach of senior leaders and local authority staff in helping them to develop their leadership skills. However, some leaders are new to their roles and further work remains to be done to enable them to check and evaluate the work in their areas of responsibility more effectively.

The governing body continues to support and provide challenge to the school. They are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, particularly in the quality of teaching. They willingly engage in training and development activities, particularly to improve their skills in challenging leaders through questioning. However, not all governors visit the school to gather first-hand evidence to enable them to hold the school even more closely to account.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- include measurable indicators of success for all groups of pupils in the school improvement plan so that leaders and governors can more effectively check on the work of the school
- ensure all leaders develop their skills in checking the quality of teaching and learning in the areas for which they are responsible
- ensure more governors gather first-hand evidence of the work of the school to enable them to effectively hold the school to account.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The support provided by the local authority has been welcomed and is effective, including that from the Education Development Partner. Education Development Advisers have provided well focused one-to-one support for teachers to help improve the quality of teaching in English and mathematics. They have also provided support to help develop the leadership skills of recently-appointed subject leaders.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Durham.

Yours sincerely

Christine Inkster

Her Majesty's Inspector