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12 September 2013

Mrs Jane Fraser
Headteacher
St Anne's CofE Lydgate Primary School
Cedar Lane
Grasscroft
Oldham
Lancashire
OL4 4DS

Dear Mrs Fraser

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Anne's CofE Lydgate Primary School, Oldham

Following my visit to your school on 11 September 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- ensure that all staff are meeting the needs of the most able pupils in order for them to make the best possible progress
- ensure that governors have the necessary skills and capacity to carry out their role effectively
- ensure that pupils rapidly improve their achievement in mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and other senior leaders, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority, representatives from the teaching school who are supporting you and two groups of pupils. I evaluated the school action plan and scrutinised other key documentation. I also had the opportunity to accompany you on a tour of the school.

Main Findings

The action plan, which was written in response to the recent inspection, very clearly sets out who will lead, monitor and evaluate the actions required for this to become a good school as soon as possible. However, although it focuses on the areas for improvement which were highlighted, you do not give enough priority to how you are going to raise achievement in mathematics and ensure that you meet the needs of the many able pupils in your school. There is a sense that you have allowed less important issues to prevent you from acting swiftly and incisively to improve what is going on in every classroom in these crucial areas.

You have taken appropriate action to tackle the areas where the quality of teaching is less than good and the staffing decisions you have made have resulted in a strong teaching profile across the school. The new leadership structure provides clear lines of responsibility which has resulted in more effective monitoring. You and other senior leaders are now working with middle leaders to develop their capacity. You encourage all your staff to be reflective practitioners. Every teacher has an individual improvement plan linked to the Teachers' Standards and they work with a learning partner to help them achieve their targets.

Senior leaders have taken decisive action to tackle the concerns raised about the teaching of phonics in the last inspection report. You have used resources effectively to reduce group sizes and started a programme of high quality training for both teachers and teaching assistants in this area. The significant improvement in the Year1 Phonics Screening Check this year, with 80% achieving the expected standard, compared to 49% last year, demonstrates that the teaching of phonics is now much more secure.

Since the recent inspection you have introduced a more rigorous system to track pupils' progress. Alongside this you have increased the amount of moderation to ensure that assessment is robust. However, you admit that this is still a 'work in progress', but it is already enabling you to track the progress of different groups of students more effectively.

The pupils I spoke to talked enthusiastically about how much better things have been since the inspection in May, but they also had views about how things could improve further. One older pupil said, 'the work wasn't hard enough before, but now it's more challenging'. Although the others agreed, some felt that they could still be challenged further, particularly in mathematics. There were similar mixed comments about other subjects, with one pupil saying, 'there's more fun stuff, for example in history', but another saying she often finds lessons, 'still too boring and basic'.

Governors have been too slow in their response to the findings of the recent inspection. They have allowed on-going issues between some parents and governors to prevent them from carrying out their main role of challenging the school on its performance. They are

supportive of you and your staff but they do not have sufficient knowledge about pupils' progress and the quality of teaching to challenge you effectively. The governing body has recently been strengthened by two new members who have educational expertise and a clear understanding of what the role involves. The governors I spoke to are in no doubt about what is now required in the areas of both personnel and training in order to move forward urgently.

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

External support

Prior to the recent inspection, the local authority had only provided light-touch support to the school. This has now been stepped up and a school performance officer has since made weekly visits to the school. You have found her input helpful, particularly when writing your action plan but unfortunately she has now left the authority and, as yet, you do not have a replacement. The local authority has made several other suggestions for both monitoring and support but there is a danger that you are being bombarded with different ideas which is not helpful at the moment. You have been proactive in seeking specific support and have formed a partnership with a local teaching school. They have produced a strategic training plan for the coming year ranging from individual coaching to whole staff sessions. Although it is too early to see the impact of this, the plan is clearly focused on the key areas identified as requiring improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Anne Seneviratne

Her Majesty's Inspector

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation