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Mr Stephen Cleland
Headteacher
Sutton St James Community Primary School
Bells Drove
Sutton St James
Spalding
Lincolnshire
PE12 0JG

Dear Mr Cleland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Sutton St James Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 30 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report my findings. 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 following the most recent section 5 inspection, which took place on 22-23rd November 2012.

This was the second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement at the inspection. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified during the section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- urgently ensure the assessment of pupils' work is accurate
- make systematic and rigorous checks on the effectiveness of the school's work and act on findings swiftly so that teaching and pupils' achievement are securely at least good
- present clear and accurate information about the school's effectiveness so that the governing body can hold you to account
- ensure staff are clear about what needs to be done to improve the school and hold them firmly to account for their effectiveness
- strengthen the leadership of English
- sustain improvements to attendance for all groups of pupils
- ensure pupils' behaviour promotes their good learning in lessons.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, five members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the inspection. Her Majesty's Inspector also spoke to the headteacher who is providing additional support to the school after the monitoring visit. The school improvement plans and documents recording the outcomes of monitoring activities were evaluated. A joint observation of teaching and learning was conducted with the headteacher was conducted in every classroom.

Context

There have been changes to the context of the school since the first monitoring inspection on 23 May 2013. The substantive headteacher has returned to his full time post. The interim headteacher, in place at the time of the first monitoring inspection, has continued to provide support to the substantive headteacher.

Main findings

The quality of leadership and management of the school

The rate of school improvement has been too slow since the last monitoring inspection. School leaders have not demonstrated that they have improved their capacity to drive school improvement forward during this time; this is despite considerable and appropriate support from the local authority and the support of another local headteacher.

You have been given support to produce self-evaluation and school development planning documentation to help drive school improvement. These have taken too long to come to fruition. You have received training and support in how to carry out effective checks on the school's work and the strategies to use to make improvements happen more quickly. These have either not been pursued with sufficient rigour or have not been used at all. Consequently, you do not have vital information to hand.

Your view of the quality of the school's work is too generous, particularly the quality of teaching and learning. You are not giving staff clear messages about what has to be done to improve and not holding teachers and other leaders sufficiently to account for the quality of their work. Other school leaders say they are not clear about their roles and responsibilities or about the vision and strategic direction of the school. The leader for mathematics now knows what needs to be done to improve pupils' achievement. Leadership in English is less developed.

Members of the governing body have responded well to previous recommendations for improvement. They have undertaken training with the local authority to help them be more effective in their role. They are keen to demonstrate a more rigorous

and structured approach. They recognise that they are still not evaluating the impact of the school's work on outcomes for all pupils rigorously enough or holding school leaders sufficiently to account for the effectiveness of their work. They report their frustration that the information they are given does not support them well enough to do this.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school's own data suggests there have been some improvements in pupils' achievement. Other evidence in school suggests that progress and attainment in English and mathematics varies greatly across the school. For many pupils it requires improvement and for some it is inadequate.

You state that you cannot be sure of the accuracy of assessments upon which your analysis of pupils' achievements is based. This must be addressed urgently in order to establish an effective system for checking on pupils' success and for planning the next steps of their learning.

Quality of teaching in the school

Evidence seen in school does not confirm your evaluation that the majority of teaching in school is of good quality. Evidence in school confirms that too much teaching remains that requires improvement or that is inadequate for all pupils to make consistently good progress or in some cases to catch up for previous underachievement.

Common features of weak lessons include:

- failure to plan work based on accurate assessment of the needs of
- children of different abilities
- low expectations of what pupils can achieve, acceptance and praise of simplistic answers and lack of challenge so that pupils reach their potential
- lack of clear and meaningful targets and success criteria so that teachers and pupils know exactly what needs to be learned
- failure to ask well-directed questions, to check for and address misconceptions and move learning on swiftly
- written and spoken feedback which does not make clear where mistakes have been made, what to do to improve and time for pupils to respond
- failure to pick up and address common and repeated spelling errors
- classroom environments which do not support pupils learning adequately and promote independence skills well enough
- acceptance of poor handwriting and presentation
- teaching assistants not directed well enough so they can make their full contribution to ensuring good learning in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils at the school

You have evaluated this aspect as 'good'. Evidence in school does not support this view. For example, attendance has not been sustained above that normally seen in most schools. Persistent absence has been high. Behaviour in some lessons interferes with learning.

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

The local authority offers either direct or brokered support which is appropriate to the needs of the school. Leadership of the school is currently dependent on this external support. The impact of this support has been weakened when it has been used or applied too slowly or selectively by school leaders. The local authority has responded swiftly to the findings of this monitoring visit and plans to carry out a review of the school's effectiveness. There will also be a full review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector