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8 May 2014

Ms Sue Goodsell (Executive Head) and Ms Claire Willows (Head of School)
Sutton St James Community Primary School
Bells Drove
Sutton St James
Spalding
PE12 0JG

Dear Ms Goodsell and Ms Willows

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

Following my visit to your school on 7 May 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the third 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.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the most recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- monitor and evaluate all the improvement actions you are taking and present your findings clearly and concisely so that you, members of the governing body and staff know exactly how well they are working
- address the remaining low expectations held by some staff and ensure the recorded guidance given about what they need to do to improve is precise
- introduce a systematic programme for members of the governing body to check on the work of the school first hand and to hold leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan and other leadership documents were scrutinised.

Context

There have been changes to the context of the school since the second monitoring inspection which took place on 1 November 2013. The substantive headteacher resigned and left his post at the end of the autumn term. The local authority brokered the support of an interim headteacher for the first three weeks of the spring term. The school formed a soft federation with Monkshouse Primary School in Spalding. The headteacher of Monkshouse Primary School has been appointed as executive headteacher of both schools and spends the equivalent of two days a week at Sutton St James. The deputy headteacher of Monkshouse Primary School has been appointed as head of school for Sutton St James and is at Sutton St James full time. The executive headteacher and head of school took up their posts on 27 January 2014. The Chair of the Governing Body and other members of the governing body have resigned. Two new, but experienced, governors have been appointed; one is the current Chair of the Governing Body at Monkshouse Primary School.

Main findings

At the last monitoring inspection in November 2013, I judged that senior leaders and governors were not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified during the section 5 inspection. Since January 2014, the rate of school improvement has quickened once again.

It is clear that you are experienced school leaders with a proven track record in school improvement. You have wasted no time in checking on the effectiveness of the school's work. As a result of your findings you have produced, and begun to implement, appropriate school improvement planning for Sutton St James. Your plans contain the correct actions and include suitably ambitious targets and timelines. The actions you have identified are being pursued with urgency. However, you do not have clear, easily accessible evidence about how well some of your actions are working which is presented in a way which is easily understood by all, including members of the governing body.

You have an accurate view of the school's work, including the quality of teaching and vital information about pupils' achievement. Importantly, you have taken immediate steps to ensure that assessment is accurate. Your analysis of the assessment data you have collected suggests that not enough pupils are making 'good' progress and, for some, progress is inadequate. As a result you have put

additional support in place to close gaps in learning. The effectiveness of this support has not been fully evaluated.

You have confirmed that the expectations held by some staff of what pupils should achieve are not high enough and that, for too long, staff have not been held sufficiently well to account for this and for the quality of their work. On occasion the written feedback given to staff about what they need to do to improve is not precise enough. Evidence in school suggests that, on occasion, some staff have not responded quickly enough to the support and guidance they have been given. As a consequence, many of the common features of the weaker teaching identified at the last monitoring inspection remain. You have put support and training opportunities in place to help teachers to improve, including the opportunity to see effective practice at Monkshouse. You are implementing a more rigorous system to hold teachers and additional adults in lessons to account for the effectiveness of their work. Some improvements have been secured. For example, pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work have improved, as has the environment to support pupils' learning within and beyond classrooms.

The leadership of literacy is being strengthened by the input of the leaders of literacy at Monkshouse School. They have led training and the implementation of a system to bring consistency to the teaching of writing across the school. The leader of mathematics has very recently relinquished this role which is to be taken by the head of school who is an experienced leader of mathematics.

The governing body has experienced a period of upheaval with several resignations and new appointments being made. However, the remaining governors are now clear about the improvements that need to be made because you have given them accurate information about the school's work. They do not have a systematic way of checking on the work of the school first hand or to hold school leaders to account for the effectiveness of their work. With the support of the local authority, and in partnership with the governing body, you have carried out an audit of the school's finances and produced a suitable plan to place the school on a secure financial footing.

There has been a notable improvement in attendance and punctuality because of your close monitoring, the improved communication with parents and the introduction of the breakfast café. You have rightly identified the need to further improve the contribution that pupils' behaviour makes to their 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 has worked to support the school through a period of upheaval and uncertainty with staffing and governance. You report that you have valued highly the support you have been given by the local authority to strengthen

leadership and management systems and particularly the support it has brokered through a consultant to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Harvey
Her Majesty's Inspector