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18 April 2013

Elaine Cox
Headteacher
Beaudesert Lower School
Appenine Way
Leighton Buzzard
LU7 3DX

Dear Mrs Cox

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Beaudesert Lower School

Following my visit to your school on 18 April 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. The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in February 2013.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority. I looked at your latest data and evaluated the school action plan. You took me on a short tour of the school.

Context

There have been no changes in the school's context since the last inspection.

Main findings

Discussions with you and other key leaders confirm a shared understanding that new approaches and ways of working show variable success in improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. You have drawn readily upon a range of external support, such as a link with a local outstanding school and courses for staff to improve teaching. Monitoring systems are sound: staff receive feedback, training and advice from key leaders so they know what they do well and what they need to work on. Changes to the marking policy and curriculum planning have been implemented although a lack of insistence for all staff to follow agreed whole-school policy means that improvement is uneven.

Your action plan addresses underachievement in Key Stage 1 and should eventually (but not rapidly) lead to improvement. However, there are weaknesses. Objectives are not specific enough so that they can be measured easily. The actions need ordering in sequence, within tighter deadlines especially in those areas proving harder to shift, such as reading. The date set to introduce new ways of teaching phonics in Years 1 and 2 is too distant, given that the current approach is not working. Teachers in Reception have already changed to a new approach with a significant improvement in children's early reading and writing skills as a result.

Governors are keen to improve their skills in holding the school to account through training. They visit the school in pairs, concentrating on one key stage, looking at pupils' achievement in a range of subjects. The governing body checks that spending of additional government funding for pupils at greatest risk of underachievement is leading to their better progress. It fulfils its duty to review the headteacher's performance annually but should develop its understanding of how the performance of other staff is managed.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- sharpen the action plan with tighter timescales, ensuring that objectives are measurable and actions are in the right sequence to reflect the reality of the school
- take action swiftly when approaches are not working or staff deviate from agreed whole-school policy
- provide governors with training to improve their understanding of data and performance management.

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

External support

The local authority has provided the school with a wide range of support. It has brokered links with an outstanding school and a national leader of governors, giving the school opportunities to engage with the very best practice. The school would benefit from similar help to raise standards in reading. I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Central Bedfordshire.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector