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20 May 2013

Mrs Susie Bagnall
Headteacher
St. Ebbe's CE Primary School
Whitehouse Road
Oxford
OX1 4NA

Dear Mrs Bagnall

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St. Ebbe's CE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 20 May 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you and the deputy headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and school improvement officers from the local authority and from the diocese, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I made brief visits to lessons with you and scrutinised governing body minutes, notes of senior team meetings and other documents detailing actions taken to improve teaching.

Context

There have been no significant changes in staffing since the inspection. However, two new teachers will join the school in September, one as leader of Key Stage 1. The current Year 5 teacher will change roles to co-ordinate strategies aimed at improving the achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals and supported by additional government funding – the pupil premium. The Chair of the Governing Body is stepping down with effect from September 2013; a replacement has not yet been appointed.

Main findings

Following a shaky start, when staff and governors found it hard to accept that the school had been judged to require improvement, there is now an acceptance that teaching needs to improve quickly to be consistently good. The headteacher and other senior leaders have introduced new approaches to monitoring teaching to make sure it improves quickly.

Since the inspection, the headteacher has changed her methods for reporting to governors, so that they can question how groups of children are doing as well as the overall school performance. This is helping them to monitor the achievement of all children, including those entitled to free school meals. From September, the new 'pupil premium champion' will focus his time on helping any children slipping behind to catch up, especially in mathematics.

Senior officers of the local authority and the diocese are now providing good support to the headteacher in making sure that the school is sharply focused on the key priorities for improvement. They are monitoring the evaluation of teaching, through joint observations with senior staff and have set dates to check on whether learning is improving fast enough. They have helped draw up a set of classroom 'non-negotiables' to make teaching better. These are helpful reminders of basic classroom expectations, such as making sure that children, as well as the teacher, have a chance to talk and are listened to, and that they understand the 'steps to success' in each lesson.

The current school improvement plan is too short-term – most actions are planned for the summer term 2013, with no set points beyond this to check on progress. It contains some useful numerical targets, such as for the proportion of children reaching expected levels in reading or in the Key Stage 1 test of letter and sound recognition. However, it does not make clear enough how teachers will change their practice to achieve these targets, or how children will learn better. Too often, there is not a clear thread running from the action to what success will look like, who will check on progress and when such checks will happen. Given that some of this work is underway, it makes sense for it to be clearly laid out in the school improvement plan, so that the headteacher and governors can use it as a single reference point against which to gauge success.

There is a stronger sense of urgency now about the required improvement. However, the school culture still needs to move further in the direction of challenge and accountability, rather than support. Teachers have too much choice about how and when their work will be monitored, rather than the cycle of improvement being firmly rooted in, and responsive only to, pupils' learning needs. This is changing, as a result of pressure from external school improvement officers and this inspection visit.

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

Senior leaders and governors, along with local authority and diocesan school improvement officers, are beginning to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. I recommend that further action is taken to:

- make sure that improvement plans detail clearly how improvements will come about, what success will look like, when monitoring will take place and by whom
- ensure that a rigorous cycle of monitoring and evaluation of teaching is clearly understood and adhered to by all, with teachers held firmly to account for the impact of their work on pupils' achievement and swift action taken as a result of what monitoring reveals
- use the local authority and diocesan monitoring visits to rapidly develop the capacity of senior leaders other than the headteacher to make sharp evaluations of the quality of teaching and 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 regarded the school as needing only light-touch support prior to the inspection. This has changed quickly. Effective partnership working between the local authority and the diocese is helping to challenge the pace of change and providing practical support to improve teaching quickly.

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

Yours sincerely

Christine Raeside
Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter will be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Director of Children's Services for Oxfordshire
- Diocese of Oxford