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17 May 2013

Mrs S Best
Headteacher
Little Marlow Church of England School
School Lane
Marlow
SL7 3SA

Dear Mrs Best

Special measures monitoring inspection of Little Marlow Church of England School

Following my visit to your school on 16 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in January 2013.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the prospective Chair of the Interim Executive Board, a consultant headteacher and a representative of the local authority. The HMI briefly toured the school while it was in session and looked at some key school documents. The local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were evaluated.

Context

Since the school entered special measures, timetabling changes have ensured that the Year 1 children stay together in one class all day, with different staffing. The headteacher no longer has a regular class teaching commitment and there is a temporary part-time teacher in Year 1. It is anticipated that, within a few days, the governing body will be replaced with an Interim Executive Board, led by an experienced Chair of the Governing Body from another local school.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The headteacher has a very clear and carefully considered vision for the school, its place in the locality and as a church school. She has high expectations and brings useful, pertinent experience. She has dealt well with matters needing quick change, as identified at the previous inspection. These include the difficulties with risk assessments, which have been thoroughly addressed, and the curriculum in the Year 1 class. She now brings a more rigorous focus on children's learning, while building on the school's existing nurturing ethos. She is quick to use, and target well, external and local support. The internal management of the school is being reorganised, with the early years teacher taking on increased responsibility. This is important, as the headteacher needs a 'sounding board' and management support within the staff, as well as from external sources. The sensible decision to take away regular class teaching responsibilities from the headteacher has released her to focus on strategic issues.

The school now has better systems for checking the quality of teaching, staff performance management and the tracking of pupils' progress. Expectations within the school are growing. Some of these developments are nevertheless basic, starting almost from scratch, which shows how far the school has yet to go.

The school action plan is a useful working document, which addresses the right areas and is driving change. The headteacher evaluates the impact of actions taken effectively and keeps useful evidence of what is achieved. Some of the basic changes are, however, not shown in the plan. In some parts of the plan, such as the section on improving teaching, more detail is required. In discussions with HMI, the headteacher showed clear understanding of these points for further improvement. She is developing her thinking on how to ensure planned targets show yet more clearly how well the school is doing in a wide range of areas. This is indicative of a leader who is thoughtful, astute and learning. The support of her former mentor, a consultant headteacher, is significant to her own professional development.

The headteacher, as part of her vision, understands the need to develop a broader curriculum. She rightly sees the potential of using expertise and resources from the local area, as well as those further afield, to provide energising first-hand experiences for the children. So far, innovations have included some externally provided physical education teaching, and the excitement of newly hatched chicks becoming members of the Reception class!

The Interim Executive Board (IEB) is not yet formed and therefore cannot yet show impact. However, its potential members have a range of useful expertise and include, rightly, a parent 'champion'. The prospective Chair of the IEB demonstrates

commitment, useful experience and real interest in the task ahead. He has high, but reasonable, expectations of the school and its leaders. He is building relationships and is clear about the need to keep everyone on their toes and sustain the pace of change. There is a sensible plan aiming to restore the school's own governing body in early 2014.

The local authority provides much useful, carefully targeted advice in areas including teaching and learning and human resources. It has formed the potential IEB. Its own plan to support the school is well formulated and explains its strategic view of the school clearly and understandably. It has brokered support for the school well, and this is helped by the fact that the headteacher clearly explains what she most needs. Rightly, the local authority has formed a focus group, made up of key players, to monitor how well the school is doing. The chair of this group has not yet visited the school, however, while in special measures.

Since the school entered special measures, all key parties have played their part well and, as a result, there is now clear direction and purpose to the school's work. The proof of this improved drive is in how well and quickly improvements happen in the teaching, curriculum and pupils' learning. These aspects will be evaluated at HMI's next visit.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The school may appoint one newly qualified teacher before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Buckinghamshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector