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6 June 2013

Mrs Julie Irving
Executive Headteacher
Arlecdon Primary School
Arlecdon Road
Arlecdon
Frizington
Cumbria
CA26 3XA

Dear Mrs Irving

Special measures monitoring inspection of Arlecdon Primary School

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

This visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in February 2013.

Evidence

During my visit I held meetings with you, representatives of the local authority, the Chair and a parent member of the Governing Body. You also took me on a tour of the school when I was able to observe children engaged in purposeful learning activities in each classroom. I also took the opportunity to evaluate a sample of pupils' writing and the quality of teachers' marking. I reviewed the local authority's post Ofsted statement of action and the school's rapid improvement plan. I also considered documents which relate to governors' monitoring of the progress being made against each of the targets in the rapid improvement plan. Finally, I scrutinised a recent report about the school written by the local authority's learning improvement officer.

Context

The headteacher, at the time of the inspection will be leaving the school at the end of the summer term. You have been appointed as executive headteacher, from a successful local school, to take responsibility for leadership and management. Your appointment is, however, temporary and you will return to your own school at the end of the autumn term 2013.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The governors and local authority accept the findings of the previous inspection and agree the areas for improvement, described in the report, provide a firm foundation on which to build an improving school.

A key priority for the governors since the previous inspection has been to secure the services of an experienced and successful headteacher to lead the school. The local authority has been quick to act on their behalf and brokered your appointment. Since joining the school you have acted speedily and written an effective improvement plan, covering the summer term. This plan and your drive and determination are beginning to secure essential improvements. However, the governors have yet to finalise the arrangements for leading and managing the school when your appointment comes to an end. They need to do this as a matter of urgency.

Supported by governors you have reviewed the school's behaviour policy and it is now being applied consistently by all staff. Consequently, the behaviour of pupils in and around the school is improving and disruptive behaviour in lessons is no longer in evidence.

You have carried out an audit of the quality of teaching in the school. You have identified teachers' strengths and highlighted what they need to do to improve their practice so that pupils' progress is accelerated. Each teacher has been given a support plan and you have put in place appropriate training to help them improve. The evidence provided from lesson observations shows that teachers are now planning much more effectively to meet the needs of all pupils. Teachers' marking of pupils' work has also improved. Marking is now much more incisive with teachers providing pupils with information about what they have done well and what they need to do to make their work even better. Your determination to improve the quality of the teaching of phonics (the sounds that words make) is already bearing fruit. The scheme you introduced for teaching this aspect of literacy in Key Stage 1 is enabling most pupils to make rapid progress.

The governing body is knowledgeable and passionate about ensuring pupils receive high quality learning experiences and are fully behind your drive to improve the school. With representatives of the local authority they have formed a group that is closely monitoring the progress that is being made against each of the targets in the rapid improvement plan. Members of this group regularly visit school and review the evidence for the impact of the work that you and your colleagues are doing. Consequently, they are able provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge; holding you and your colleagues to account.

The local authority's post Ofsted statement of action is succinct, well written and meets requirements. The targets in the plan relate to the areas for improvement as described in the previous inspection report. The time scales, in the plan, inject a sense of urgency into the pace of improvement. Accordingly the local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

Your rapid improvement plan demonstrates your pragmatic approach and has been effective in focusing the work of you and your colleagues on improving the school. It provides a clear direction for ensuring quick gains and has been effective in doing so. However, as the plan only covers a period of one term it does not provide a long-term strategy for how the school will continue to improve over the next two to three years. While governors propose to

produce a comprehensive development plan by the end of term, the timing for its production needs to be brought forward so that opportunities for further improving the school can be identified and proceed without delay. Therefore, at the moment, the school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose.

We discussed your concerns about the appointment of newly qualified teachers and the condition in the inspection report that the school is not allowed to do so. We agreed that the school could appoint newly qualified teachers on condition that they receive highly quality support from a trained mentor and are given regular opportunities to observe good to outstanding practice. You confirmed that both conditions could be met as part of the partnership arrangement in place between your own school and Arlecdon.

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

Yours sincerely

Charles Lowry
Her Majesty's Inspector