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Mrs Ruth Boniface
Acting headteacher
Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Birchwood
Birchanger
Bishop's Stortford
CM23 5QL

Dear Mrs Boniface

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchanger Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, two subject leaders and five governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I met the school improvement partner and spoke with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. We carried out short visits to lessons and I spoke to pupils about their work.

Context

After the inspection, one supply teacher left the school. A new supply teacher is currently teaching the Year 5/6 class until the end of term. Two new teachers have been appointed for September 2013. The number of children in Reception is rising and plans are in place to provide additional teaching space. The headteacher is currently on sick leave.

Main findings

With the support of the governing body, you are tackling weaknesses with determination during the headteacher's absence and the school is making progress towards becoming a good school. The school plan identifies clearly what needs to be done and by when. It is a helpful tool for improvement because staff and governors are using it to check progress at regular intervals.

Teachers report that you are doing a 'tremendous job' and this visit confirms their views. You are instrumental in sustaining high staff morale and you focus on what matters most. For example, with the support of all teachers, you are taking energetic action to ensure that assessment of pupils' work is more accurate and work to challenge the more able pupils is progressing well. The use of targets to raise standards requires consolidation. You are managing provision for pupils who need additional help more effectively and training for learning support assistants is in hand. Because the school is small, you are also teaching full time and your burden is heavy. Swift action is required to strengthen leadership capacity.

The literacy and numeracy leaders are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' work in their subjects. There is evidence of significant improvement in the Year 5/6 class and pupils told me that they understood their work more and that behaviour was now good.

Governors are providing excellent support to the school during the headteacher's absence. They ensure that they have the necessary information to verify the progress made. They are also keeping parents well informed and liaising with the local authority so that the provision of an additional classroom is managed efficiently with minimum disruption to pupils' learning and welfare.

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

- raise expectation further by setting targets for the number of pupils making and exceeding expected progress in all years
- strengthen the leadership capacity of the school during the headteacher's absence.

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 school improvement partner and local authority advisers are supporting the school. You can contact a local experienced headteacher for further guidance. Staff work with a local school to share good practice and improve assessment. An induction and mentoring programme is in place for the new teachers.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chelmsford Diocese education adviser and the Director of Children's Services for Essex local authority.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector