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23 September 2013

Mrs Valda McGee
Headteacher
Beechwood School
Meredith Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 2PH

Dear Mrs McGee

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beechwood School, Cheshire East

Following my visit, accompanied by David Selby, Her Majesty's Inspector (Schools), to your school on 20 September 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 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 June 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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:

- work with external partners to:
 - Ensure that the school's development plan makes absolutely clear the intended impact of each action on the achievement of every group of pupils, particularly of those who have special educational needs and/or are in receipt of the pupil premium funding.
 - Ensure that the significant gains made since the last inspection in the quality of teaching and in the achievement of some pupils, for example at Key Stage 1, are secured and extended consistently across the school and especially at Key Stage 2.
 - Extend, as rapidly as possible, the range of strategies that the school uses, so that attendance improves still further.
 - Maintain effective support for the Governing Body in order to increase their capacity to ask challenging questions about the school's performance.

Evidence

Context

The year since your appointment has been a period of considerable change at the school, including a significant turnover of teaching staff. A full senior leadership team has only recently been secured, through new appointments and role changes at both senior and subject level. As part of this transition four newly qualified teachers joined the school in September 2013. Most members of the Governing Body, including the Chair are also recent appointments.

Main findings

Although a relatively new team, you and your senior leaders share a good understanding of what the school needs to do in order to become good. You and other leaders in the school are vigorous, enthusiastic and committed to the school's improvement. In the short time since the last inspection you have made headway, some of it considerable, in tackling the areas for improvement recommended at the time of the last inspection. For example, you have raised some aspects of pupils' achievement and improved the quality of teaching significantly. Attendance has also shown improvement. Senior and other staff have been well supported by initial professional development but you are aware that there remains much work to be done before the whole school is operating at full strength in all aspects of its work.

The school development plan is fit for purpose. A suite of documents comprises a self-evaluation document and more detailed action plans for the four aspects of the Inspection Framework. Taken together, these set a clear agenda for the school's improvement. Nevertheless some minor adjustments would make it more accessible to all who need to use it. More detail is also needed on how the various actions are to be carried out, especially in the case of different pupil groups.

You have adopted a very determined and systematic approach to improving the school. You have put in place, for example, very robust procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. It is evident from records of your own and external moderation that most teaching is now good, with some that is outstanding. A programme of very effective professional development has all but eradicated teaching that requires improvement or that is inadequate. Nevertheless, all initiatives to improve teaching and other aspects of the school's work are not yet securely and consistently in place. For example, the sample of pupils' work seen during my visit showed that feedback from marking is not yet consistently helpful or challenging enough across year groups and subjects.

Systems of target setting for performance management hold teachers to account effectively. They are supported and challenged in equal measure with rigorous targets, support plans and tailored professional development. Although you are supported by a very new Governing Body, neither you nor they shy away from hard staffing decisions where teaching is less than good.

The school has made a good start to improving pupils' achievement. You have halted the previous under-achievement at Key Stage 1 and some pupil groups who previously lagged behind, such as some of those who are in receipt of the pupil premium, have made up ground. However, the school's strenuous efforts to compensate for the sudden loss of a teacher came too late to prevent a decline in the national test results at Key Stage 2 in summer 2013.

A few parents and pupils expressed informally during my visit some concerns about bullying and the extent to which the school meets their children's needs. However, recent Parent View questionnaires confirm that most parents and carers who responded are happy with these areas of the school's work.

Attendance is higher at this point in the year compared to last year and is now broadly average. You work very hard to ensure that pupils attend regularly, but you should investigate an even wider range of strategies, to improve attendance still further, as part of the development of behaviour for learning across the school.

Members of the new Governing Body are eager to fulfil their roles more effectively and have taken the initiative in seeking external support and a review of their practice. They now have a clear structure and more systematic procedures but they are at a very early stage of development in being able to challenge the school.

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 makes good use of a range of external support. The Local Authority has provided effective support for governor training. The school also draws on the services of an independent School Improvement Partner and a headteacher from an outstanding school within the Crewe Training School Alliance, to support its quality assurance and self-evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body
- Local authority
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate