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16 October 2013
Richard Culham
Headteacher
Birchfield Community Primary School
Birchfield Road
Yeovil
Somerset
BA21 5RL

Dear Mr Culham

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchfield Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 15 October 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 July 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:

- sharpen your school improvement plan by including short term goals (milestones) so that governors can hold leaders to account for the rate of improvement more effectively
- clearly specify in your improvement plan **how** governors are involved in checking on the progress of the school's actions in improving teaching and raising standards. For example, shadowing senior leaders checking on the quality of teachers' marking.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, and two of your three assistant headteachers, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met with two members of the Governing Body. A separate phone discussion was carried out with a representative of the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated.

Context

Since the inspection in July 2013 the deputy headteacher and three classteachers have left. The senior leadership team now consists of three assistant headteachers and yourself. The Governing Body has a new Vice Chair.

Main findings

You have quickly developed the skills of the assistant headteachers in checking more thoroughly the quality of teaching in the school. Staff are responding positively to the coaching approach in helping them to improve their practice. Teachers are using assessment of pupils' learning more accurately. This is making sure that pupils of different abilities are given work which is set at the correct level. The work is now more challenging for all pupils, and so you are beginning to see better progress. Pupils are responding more regularly to teachers' marking. As a result, they are better aware of how well they are doing. Pupils are clearer about what they need to do next to improve their work. The most recent checks show that the quality of teaching is improving.

Governors are gaining skills from undertaking an external review of governance. They have more confidence in holding school leaders to account for improving teaching. They have carried out an audit of the skills and experience they bring to the Governing Body. This showed that governors are less secure on understanding school and national assessment information. As a follow-up there are plans in place to train and skill up governors in interpreting pupil progress information. The governing body is also in the process of restructuring committees with the view to working more smartly, leading to a sharper focus on the areas for improvement from the inspection in July.

Your school improvement plan is comprehensive and sets out a timetable of actions in order to secure further improvement. This is sensibly linked to a timetable of professional development for staff. Although the improvement plan contains success criteria about pupils' achievements, there are too few interim steps along the way. Without these short term goals, it is difficult for governors and senior leaders to check that the rate of progress is consistent and sustained in all classes and/or key stages. It would be helpful if governors who are linked to Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2 were able to join phase leaders on their learning walks, say on pupils' targets in

mathematics, and compare their findings from each key stage, to check on consistency. In this way the Governing Body would add value to its role by carrying out monitoring in a more precise way than previously.

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 has chosen the route of school to school support. A local leader in education is working with the school, as are two consultants, one for literacy and one for numeracy. The feedback and indications are that the school is moving forward positively on all the areas of improvement from the Ofsted inspection.

Currently a representative from another local authority is working on a part-time basis for Somerset and keeps an overview of the progress the school is making.

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

Yours sincerely

Jane Neech

Her Majesty's Inspector