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16 October 2013

Mr M Hancock
Headteacher
Bickleigh Down Church of England Primary School
School Drive
Woolwell
Plymouth
PL6 7JW

Dear Mr Hancock

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bickleigh Down Church of England Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 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:

- ensure your improvement plans have clear measurable outcomes with regular milestones to check on the progress of these
- continue to rigorously monitor new initiatives to enable them to fully embed and raise achievement further.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, a representative from Devon local authority and members of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. There were also a number of short visits to lessons. The school action plan was also evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection, you have developed a new leadership structure to include someone focusing solely on improving the quality of teaching.

Main findings

Since the previous inspection, you have raised expectations particularly with regards to the quality of teaching. You are linking these expectations to challenging performance management targets to hold staff at all levels to account for the achievement of pupils.

You have identified the quality of individual teachers through using evidence from lesson observations, learning walks, book scrutiny and achievement data. Those teachers that have been classified as not yet good, have been put on a developmental program, which includes visiting a local teaching school to observe their practice. In between visits, the teachers are required to carry out developmental tasks. There is evidence from re-observations that some of these teachers are improving.

You rightly understand the contribution that teaching assistants make to pupils' learning. Teaching assistants have been subject to a similar process to teachers to improve the practice of those identified as needing support.

A new marking policy has been implemented to enable pupils to respond to teachers' comments. This has been monitored by yourself and governors. Your evidence shows that pupils are beginning to understand the next steps in their learning. A calculations policy has been implemented to ensure there is consistency across classes in the way that pupils perform mathematical processes. During my visits to lessons, this was seen to be operating well. Classrooms have learning ladders on the walls. These show pupils each learning step in literacy and numeracy. Pupils' photos are placed next to the level they are working at and pupils are able to identify what they need to do to move onto the next level.

Performance management processes have been strengthened considerably. Targets are clearly linked to ensuring pupils make good and better progress. Targets are also personalised to each cohort of students. For example, in some year groups there is a focus on raising boys' reading levels and others to focus on achievement for pupils eligible for the pupil premium. Teachers on the upper pay spine are being utilised by leading on whole school initiatives linked to pupils' achievement.

Governors and senior leaders have identified key actions to bring about improvement and these are regularly monitored. Many new initiatives and processes have been implemented since the previous inspection. These will need more time to embed fully and raise achievement further. Action plans do not always have clear, measurable outcomes, which can be used to check on the progress of these.

Achievement data from the 2013 Year 6 tests show a significant improvement in outcomes for writing and mathematics. Your internal data indicates that this trend of improvement is continuing.

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

You have received support from Devon local authority. The local authority identified the school as in danger of requiring improvement in 2012 and began a program of support. Although the school was deemed to require improvement at the previous inspection, there are clear signs of improvement now. The local authority has brokered support with a local teaching school. They also monitor the school's progress termly through visits from a team of advisors.

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

Yours sincerely

Simon Rowe
Her Majesty's Inspector