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Mr Ian Cookson
Headteacher
Bleasdale Church of England Primary School
Bleasdale
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Dear Mr Cookson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bleasdale Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 12 November 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 on 12 September 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:

- establish links with a local school with established good practice in meeting the needs of pupils who are in a mixed age class spanning whole key stages
- investigate approaches for developing extended writing, through links with other schools
- ensure that there is greater rigour in scrutinising pupils' work and providing feedback to teachers following lesson observations in order to evidence the improvement in teaching over time.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, two governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives of the local authority and all three teachers. During these meetings we discussed the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Brief visits were made to both classes during morning lessons. The school's records of pupil progress were scrutinised and pupils' exercise books were considered.

Context

There have been no changes to staffing, governance arrangements or pupil numbers since the section 5 inspection which judged the school to require improvement.

Main findings

The inspection outcome came as a shock to the school community and has been met with determination from yourself, governors, teachers and pupils for the school to become at least good. A 'can do' spirit permeates the school. There is a shared understanding that pupils' progress needs to accelerate in order for their achievement to be good.

A rigorous approach to tracking pupils' achievement has been developed. The school's tracking document indicates the amount of progress pupils are making in comparison with national rates from their various starting points and it is regularly reviewed. Pupils have a clear understanding of their targets and parents have been provided with detail about their children's achievements and how they might help to boost their progress.

Improvements have been made to teachers' planning in order that there is a clear focus on pupils' levels of attainment and the steps needed to secure expected and good progress. Teachers are trying hard to provide stimulating and enjoyable activities to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Further training is being provided by the local authority consultant to help teachers ensure that they meet the needs of all pupils within their small classes.

Teachers' marking has improved. You have developed a whole school policy for providing feedback to pupils and identifying errors. Teachers pose individual questions to pupils when they mark their books and provide time for pupils to answer these. This strategy is helping pupils to become more independent learners. Pupils say that their work is improving because of their teachers' advice. Detailed conversations between the Key Stage 2 teacher and individual pupils have focused on setting targets for reading, writing and mathematics and agreeing how these should be reached. More challenge is evident in the targets being set for pupils.

Improving literacy teaching and learning is a key focus for the school. Pupils are encouraged to write in response to different stimuli, including visits such as a recent trip to Blackpool Illuminations and to the University of Central Lancashire observatory. Teachers encourage pupils to include expressive vocabulary and to experiment with language. They are keen to find more interesting ways of exploring spelling, punctuation and grammar so that the use of worksheets is minimised.

You have scrutinised pupils' books on a regular basis but your analysis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching resulting from this scrutiny could be strengthened and linked with feedback to teachers from lesson observations, so that there is a comprehensive view of how teachers are maximising pupils' progress.

There is clarity that teaching time is not lost at times when you are not on site, through improved communication systems that mean you are accessible if leadership decisions need to be taken in your absence.

The governing body has been strengthened by the introduction of a standards and effectiveness committee through which you are held to account and progress in implementing the school's action plan is evaluated. You recognise the need for the school to become more outward-facing, for instance through researching good practice from colleagues in other schools so that teachers are able to benchmark their own practice and learn collaboratively. Schools have been identified to share good practice.

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 provides timely and insightful support. The work of the school adviser has been valuable, particularly in helping you to devise the improvement plan. The adviser is the substantive headteacher of a Lancashire primary school whose practice in literacy you and your teachers intend to consider. The Monitoring and Intervention Team (MIT) adviser is working with the newly established Standards and Effectiveness Committee of the Governing Body to ensure that they receive appropriate information and challenge you constructively. The MIT adviser is supporting your liaison with another small rural school where classes include pupils from whole key stages.

Support is being provided by the local authority teaching and learning consultant, focused on improving the teaching of literacy. The support programme is in its early stages but is already positively regarded by the Key Stage 2 teacher. Governors have also received support through the Lancashire Governors' Forum.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector