

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566862
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
rcowley@cfbt.com



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Mrs Sharon Bruton
Headteacher
Abram CofE Primary School
Simpkin Street
Abram
Wigan
Lancashire
WN2 5QE

Dear Mrs Bruton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Abram CofE Primary School, Wigan

Following my visit to Abram CE Primary School on 10 January 2014, 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 October 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:

- indicate in the action plan who will monitor the action being taken and who will evaluate the impact and, where possible, stagger the timing of the evaluation procedures so that key findings inform the meetings of the monitoring committee of the governing body
- take prompt steps to ensure that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment is accurate and that the school has a viable baseline from which to judge progress and to set challenging targets.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the acting headteacher, three members of the governing body who are acting as a monitoring committee, and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. Phase 1 of the action plan was evaluated.

Context

The school joined three other schools in The Keys Federation in late November 2013. The federation is led by you in your role as Executive Headteacher. You are also a national leader in education. The headteacher of Abram CE Primary has been absent since the first week in December. You are overseeing the school with the day-to-day running in the hands of an acting headteacher who is an assistant headteacher and specialist leader of education within the federation.

Main findings

Much has been done since December to analyse where change is needed and to establish a clear understanding of how this can be achieved. For example, you quickly recognised that the layout of the building and existing procedures accounted in large part for some pupils' misbehaviour. Prompt action to alter lunchtime routines and practices, such as pupils leaving the dining area by the door from the hall onto the playground, has already had a beneficial impact on pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Similarly, the clarifying of roles and responsibilities and the re-allocation of teaching support staff has ensured that pupils with special educational needs now have support at relevant times.

You and the acting headteacher are also welcoming the views and solutions of parents, staff and pupils, as in what might be valued as a reward for good behaviour. Teaching and non-teaching staff are working together to regain pride in the school and anecdotal evidence indicates that parents are seeing a noticeable positive difference, referring to the school being 'tidier, more organised and more presentable'. You also judge there to have been a marked step forward by staff as a result of their willingness to act on advice and to profit from effective practice elsewhere.

You are aware that the three issues identified in the inspection in October are more complex than they appear. You are rightly using skills, expertise and knowledge of staff within the federation to conduct in-depth reviews and to identify where action is needed. These reviews have raised additional underlying issues, such as anomalies in pupils' progress and the possible inaccuracy in teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment. It is imperative that a reliable and valid baseline of pupils' attainment is agreed and your involvement of the federation's inclusion manager is a good step in this process. The school is missing many of the well-established procedures seen in most schools, especially regarding the monitoring and evaluation of its own performance and that of different groups of pupils. To resolve this situation, you are drawing on common policies within the federation to establish expectations, including those relating to teaching and accountability for pupils' progress. You have agreed clear protocols for your work and that of the acting/headteacher and teaching staff are taking part in learning sessions linked to key elements of the action plan.

Phase 1 of the action plan is thorough, detailed and systematic with clear success criteria and timescales. It unpicks the three areas for improvement given in the October report and appropriately identifies leadership and management as a key separate issue. The impact of action to date has been added. Although there is reference to monitoring and evaluation as part of the 'how' section, the plan lacks a clear picture of who will monitor and when, and likewise, who will evaluate and when and how this is linked to the half-termly meetings of the monitoring committee.

Some former governors have joined the over-arching governing body of the federation and also the smaller monitoring committee; members have experience and proven successful expertise in monitoring the progress of a school which needs to improve quickly. Your position statement and analysis of data have given them an informed picture of the school's current situation, including the need to validate data and to question critically the links between teaching and learning.

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 is making apposite use of the resources within the federation by sharing expertise and practice. You, through your work as a national leader in education, are also able to draw on other contacts, as well as schools within the local partnership. The local authority, which has been supporting the leadership of the school over the last year, intends to continue to monitor the school's progress on a termly basis. It has agreed financial support to ensure that the school remains stable, although recognising it is over-staffed, and will consider bids for funding for specific aspects.

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

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following: