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26 February 2014

Mr Andrew Mellor
Headteacher
Blackpool St Nicholas CofE Primary School
School Road
Marton Moss
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY4 5DS

Dear Mr Mellor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Blackpool St Nicholas CofE Primary School, Blackpool

Following my visit to your school on 25 February 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 December 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders, governors and the local authority are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The school should take immediate action to:

- re-write the school action plan so that all staff, governors and parents can clearly see what the school's top priorities are and how 'good progress' for all pupils will be measured
- ensure that all staff and governors understand the action plan and their part in bringing about improvements
- improve attendance particularly for Gypsy Roma children and those who are eligible for the pupil premium
- robustly evaluate the impact of the pupil premium for 2013-14 and plan accordingly for 2014-15
- ensure that teachers receive simple, specific feedback on how they can improve the progress pupils make in their lessons
- ensure that teachers know what their planning should include and how often it will be checked
- seek an external review of the governing body by a National Leader of Governance and ensure that governors have a secure understanding of school performance data.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders and representatives of the governing body to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I spoke to the local authority and School Improvement Partner. I carried out two observations of teaching accompanied by senior leaders. The school action plans, data around achievement and records pertaining to the monitoring of teaching and learning were evaluated.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection one teacher has left and a newly qualified teacher has been appointed in Year 3. The school is expecting to convert to an academy on the 1st June as part of the Cidari Education Multi-Academy Trust.

Main findings

The pace of change is too slow. It is nearly 3 months since the section 5 inspection and there is still no definitive action plan. There are too many plans and too many priorities so it is unclear what the top priorities are and where teachers should focus their efforts. The language used in the plan is overly- complicated and it is not clear how success will be measured so governors are unable to effectively hold senior leaders to account.

You and the deputy headteacher are able to evaluate accurately the quality of teaching and give clear and simple points for improvement. However records of lesson observations show that this approach is inconsistent and teachers do not always receive clear feedback about what they need to do to improve.

You have begun to tackle underperformance through more effective monitoring of teaching and learning. However, teachers' planning is not checked regularly enough leading to some poor quality teaching going unchecked.

School data show that pupils are making much better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupil premium funding has not been targeted at improving attendance for children who are eligible for free school meals; this has prevented them from making at least the progress they are capable of.

The governing body has established a 'standards and effectiveness committee' to enable them to hold senior leaders to account more effectively. This group has not yet met. Governors do not have a sufficiently secure understanding of published school performance data and therefore are unable to challenge senior leaders as effectively as they should.

External support

The local authority has not supported the school effectively in their response to the Section 5 inspection. Senior leaders have been invited to a local authority focus group meeting but the meeting has not yet taken place.

You have sought the support of a School Improvement Partner from a neighbouring authority and linked with a National Leader of Education. Through this work you intend to provide high-quality professional development for staff, but the partnerships are very recent and it is too soon to measure the impact.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
Her Majesty's Inspector