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8 April 2014

Mrs Jackie Bunyan
Headteacher
Bolton Parish Church CofE Primary School
Kestor Street
Bolton
Lancashire
BL2 2AN

Dear Mrs Bunyan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bolton Parish Church CofE Primary School, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 7 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the findings. 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection.

This is because, despite the positive action taken to halt a decline in pupils' progress, there is still some way to go before the school could confidently judge this progress to be good. Likewise leadership is still reliant on external support and new members have yet to prove they can contribute, long term, to the improvement of the school.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the Chair of the Governing Body, two representatives of the local authority, and the headteacher, a Local Leader of Education (the headteacher of the partnership school) to discuss the action taken since the last inspection and my last visit. I looked at improvement plans and the support plan from the partnership school. I looked at the most recent achievement of pupils, your evaluations of the quality of teaching, reports from the local authority and records of governor visits to school. I made a tour of the school and visited a further three lessons for a short time.

Context

Since my visit in April 2013 the school has experienced some significant upheaval. The deputy headteacher retired in July 2013. At the same time the remaining three members of the senior leadership team left to take up positions in other schools. Similarly two teaching assistants left the school. In September a new deputy headteacher, an assistant headteacher, two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and three new teaching assistants joined the school. The assistant headteacher has been on illness absence since December; this class is covered by the teacher who normally provides cover for teachers' planning time. In December the Year 1 teacher left the school and an experienced teacher (on a long term supply basis) is in that class. She is also acting as assistant head teacher. Since February half term the Nursery teacher has been on maternity leave and her class is covered by a supply teacher. A supply teacher provides additional support in Year 3 and Year 6.

Main findings

Through observations of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' workbooks and teachers' planning, and checking pupil progress information the headteacher and governors identified that pupils' progress, especially across Key Stage 2, was not accelerating as quickly as they had planned. Swift action was taken to remedy the situation. Leadership did not shy away from difficult decisions to improve the quality of teaching. A partnership was established with a local outstanding school to provide support for leadership and to strengthen the quality of teaching. Through this partnership essential systems for monitoring were strengthened. For example, the reviewed system for tracking pupils' progress has resulted in a more concise understanding of pupils' progress; it is used better to identify which pupils are underachieving. This has led to more focused extra support for these pupils. This means that leaders can hold teachers to account better for the progress their pupils make.

All teachers have visited the partnership school to observe lessons in which pupils experienced good learning which has resulted in higher expectations for teachers and for pupils. Classrooms are bright, well presented areas with equipment readily available to aid pupils in their learning. During my walk around I noticed pupils working hard and persevering. There was a very productive atmosphere. Pupils were happy to answer my questions and show me their work. For example, a group of children in Reception had made sandwiches and were writing out the instructions; they happily, and proudly, read out to their teacher, and me, their writing. Pupils' work is very tastefully displayed and shows that teachers value their pupils' efforts. Each teacher has a 'coaching' plan and works with the equivalent year teacher from the partnership school to develop practice in key aspects of teaching. Teachers have responded very well to this training as they want to improve their practice. The headteacher checks on the success of these plans weekly through a discussion with each teacher, informal visits to lessons, regular scrutinies of pupils' workbooks and formal observations termly. Consequently, leadership has a tighter grasp on how teaching is improving pupils' learning and can identify where further training is needed. This information shows that the quality of teaching is starting to have a better impact on pupils' learning across the school.

The school improvement plan is appropriate and has been amended to initiate more rapid progress. It is divided into half termly plans and specifies the action to be taken to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement. A small group of governors checks on the success of this plan and the progress of pupils weekly. Governors know the school much better. The Chair of Governors has linked a governor to each class and members visit the

class each half term to look at a sample of pupils' work books with the teacher and discuss how marking helps pupils to improve their work, presentation and handwriting. In this way governors are challenging and supporting leadership and class teachers.

The departure of the senior leadership team in summer 2013 meant that the leadership of the school rested solely on the headteacher until new staff became accustomed to systems in the school. The specific issues which arose in the autumn term resulted in a drop in the rate of pupils' progress across Key Stage 2. Action taken by the governors, headteacher and local authority have halted that deterioration and pupils are starting to make better progress again.

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

Through the autumn and spring terms the local authority evaluated the progress of the school by conducting two learning walks, three separate reviews of the school's work and a separate book scrutiny and provided substantial information for the Governing Body. The local authority has provided effective support for the new leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The partnership school has delivered effective support for leadership through the review of essentials systems for example, tracking pupil progress information and the development of a new curriculum.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Bolton and as below.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Her Majesty's Inspector

The letter should be copied to the following:

- Appropriate authority - Chair of the Governing Body/Interim Executive Board
- Local authority - including where the school is an academy
- Contractor providing support services on behalf of the local authority - where appropriate
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- < Diocese - for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- DfE - Academies Advisers Unit [colin.diamond@education.gsi.gov.uk] - for academies