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28 April 2014

Ms Dawn Rapson
Acting Headteacher
Birchwood CofE Primary School
The Mount
Admirals Road
Birchwood
Warrington
Cheshire
WA3 6QG

Dear Ms Rapson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Birchwood CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 25 April 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you, three members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Three more governors joined us for the feedback meeting. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the recent inspection two members of staff, including the headteacher, have left the school. The governing body is in the process of recruiting for a new headteacher.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

Leadership, including governance, has continued to build on the secure foundations established just prior to the January 2014 inspection. Improving the quality of teaching remains the focal point for improvement and dictates any decisions taken by the governors. Adaptations made to the existing school improvement plan have taken into account the recommendations from the recent inspection. As an operational plan this reflects well the strategic plan of the local authority so that all involved in the improvement of the school are working together and can plot progress. Currently the plans cover developments over two terms; it is essential now that the plans are extended to cover an 18 month period and include specific timings so that progress can be revised at key points and swift progress can be plotted.

The acting headteacher uses an array of checking techniques, such as looking at teachers' planning, marking and pupils' workbooks, to provide a clear picture of the quality of teaching throughout the school. She is increasingly supporting senior and subject leaders to do the same so that they can check their contribution to improvement, as leaders, in their subjects. Through reflection on their own practice and receipt of feedback about their teaching, teachers know how to improve. Strengths of teachers are shared through modelling and coaching activities. Teachers now have a 'toolkit' to support aspects of their teaching. Professional training is organised to strengthen all teaching. For example, through training on behaviour management and a review of the policy, teachers are more consistent in their approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Consequently, pupils are more receptive and engaged and can make better progress. Several teachers have visited good schools to observe teachers' practice and are starting to use these new ideas in their own lessons. Through the expertise of the acting headteacher and some external moderation, the school considers that pupils' assessment information is mostly secure so that progress can be measured correctly. Through this central approach of nurturing the quality of teaching while at the same time holding teachers to account for pupils' progress, the school is starting to move on. According to the acting headteacher's records the school has reached its spring target for raising the quality of teaching to good. Leaders and governors are confident that pupils in Year 6 will meet national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics in the forthcoming tests and assessments. Attendance has improved upon that at the same time last year and incidents of poor behaviour have dropped significantly.

Governors have taken hard decisions in their mission to improve the school. Members know the school well and, as many are new to the role, they bring a fresh view to the improvement needed. They use their experience, expertise and knowledge to support leaders but also challenge strenuously so that all action is taken for the benefit of pupils. A review of governance with a focus on the use of the pupil premium is due to take place in the next two weeks. An action group of four governors meets regularly to monitor the progress of the school. A senior adviser from the local authority is a member of this group and attends all other governing body meetings. Similarly, the local authority monitors the progress of the

school at termly intervals and the operational adviser monitors the school every six months.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Interim Executive Director Families & Wellbeing for Warrington. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew

Senior Her Majesty's Inspector