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12 June 2014

Alison Anderson
Headteacher
Buckden CofE Primary School
School Lane
Buckden
St Neots
PE19 5TT

Dear Miss Anderson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Buckden CofE Primary School - Primary Academy Trust.

Following my visit to your school on 11 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 2014. 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:

- increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and specify the targets for pupils exceeding expected progress
- maximise the benefit of external support by:
 - linking clearly the professional development activities to the key priorities of the school's Raising Attainment Plan
 - summarising the advice from different providers of support so that it is coherent and best practice is applied quickly
 - and checking the impact of external training and interventions.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, the assistant headteacher and subject leaders for English and mathematics. I spoke to the local authority representative and met three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. I evaluated the

Raising Attainment Plan and read a range of documentation. We carried out brief visits to lessons and spoke to pupils about their work.

Main findings

Soon after the inspection, with the support of staff and governors, you swiftly took action to address weaknesses. The strategies used to improve the teaching of mathematics and to ensure that pupils respond to teachers' marking are effective. Consequently, the school is making steady progress towards becoming a good school. The plans and strategies are clearly focused on accelerating pupils' progress. Targets to ensure that teaching is consistently good are precise. However, actions to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and targets for pupils making more than expected progress are not sufficiently clear to contribute to your key priority of accelerating progress for more able pupils. As we visited classes, I noted that consistent approaches are now used to check that pupils respond to teachers' marking through the '*Highlighted Box*' strategy. More able pupils told me that they are now given more challenging tasks and that the recent additional mathematics lessons provided by the local secondary school are helping them do even harder work. The identified issue of raising achievement in reading and writing is also being addressed. It is too early to see the full impact of your work but staff have accessed a range of training opportunities and are applying new ideas to improve their practice. Current data and predicted results for 2014 appear stronger than in previous years.

With the support of your assistant headteacher you are clearly articulating what needs to be done to make the school a good or better school. Your evaluation of teaching and learning is frequent and is routinely part of the normal working week. This gives you and the four phase leaders opportunities to check the effectiveness of activities on pupils' daily experiences. Plans are in hand to strengthen the leadership skills of subject leaders, although training has not yet taken place. You rightly want to link this training to teachers' performance management and to the staffing structure review due in July. It is therefore too early to find evidence of significant progress on this issue.

Governors have clear timelines and processes to check progress against the key issues identified at the inspection. They are keen to refine their skills further to help them gather objective evidence of improvements, independently of your senior leadership team.

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 welcomes the support that education consultants and advisers provide. Staff belong to a wide range of useful networks and have links with other schools in the locality to share effective practice. The local authority is also available for additional support and challenge. You need to bring more coherence to the numerous interventions and training. The match between professional development activities and the key priorities of the school's Raising Attainment Plan is not always clear. There is a risk that conflicting advice delays improvement. You should

therefore check the impact of external and in-school support and communicate strongly to staff what best practice means for your school.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire, the education adviser from the Diocese of Ely, and the Department for Education - Academies Advisers Unit.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé
Her Majesty's Inspector