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16 July 2014

Mrs Christine Adams
Headteacher
Banks Methodist School
Chapel Lane
Banks
Southport
Merseyside
PR9 8EY

Dear Mrs Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Banks Methodist School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 15 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 March 2014. 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. The school should take immediate action to:

- strengthen governance by ensuring that governors have the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to offer robust support and challenge.
- eradicate inadequate teaching in class 1 and 2.
- ensure that teaching assistants are held accountable for the progress of children they teach.
- gain local authority support for improvement in mathematics.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher in class one and two.

Context

Since the section 5 inspection one member of staff has resigned. Seven governors have resigned and three new ones have been appointed. Two permanent appointments have been made to the teaching staff for September.

Main findings

The headteacher has begun to strengthen governance. A number of governors have left and new governors have been appointed with a track record of expertise and current, relevant experience. They know that standards in the school are too low because teaching is not good enough. However, there remain some governors who do not have an acceptable understanding of how well children are achieving; therefore they are unable to challenge the headteacher effectively. Some governors are unaware of the scale of pupils' underachievement in the school.

Pupils were observed during the visit making inadequate progress in class one and two. This is because teaching is dull and lacks a clear purpose and there is inappropriate support and challenge for different abilities. The work provided to pupils is either too easy, or it is not explained well enough so pupils find it too hard. As a result, pupils often show little or no engagement in their learning and sometimes talk over the teacher.

Behaviour at lunchtime is good. Pupils are well-mannered, polite and capable of working very well together with little supervision. Pupils say that lunchtimes are much more fun now because they can play tennis and other games.

There are a number of teaching assistants who regularly work with very small groups of children yet there is no system in place to manage their performance or to hold them accountable for the progress and behaviour of the pupils they work with.

The headteacher has now been in her substantive role for three months. During this time she has had a very positive impact upon standards in the school. She has raised expectations across the board and understands that the pace of change now needs to increase. There is a clear and well-organised plan in place. She has begun to robustly challenge some of weak teaching, but is fully aware that there is still

some way to go before teaching is consistently good. Consequently some staff have left and there have been high levels of staff absence.

She has rightly identified a number of weaknesses in the school's provision, policies and procedures. She has already overhauled mathematics and taken on the subject leadership herself. She has implemented necessary basic systems such as a calculations policy so that children and parents use the same methodology to solve problems in mathematics. However, there is a lot of work to do in order for children to make the progress they are capable of in mathematics, so further support in this area is needed.

Training sessions for parents have been provided to help them support their child's learning in mathematics and phonics. Parents now receive more detailed reports about their child's progress and a parent's forum has been established to allow parents to give their views and ask questions.

This summer's end of Key Stage 2 results are good in writing and pupils made expected progress in reading. However, mathematics results were low and indicate significant underachievement.

Prior to these results being received, the headteacher had rightly recognised that data historically were inaccurate and that governors and the local authority had been given a much too favourable view of progress. Consequently, she has already made good headway into a root and branch overhaul of the school's tracking, assessment and data systems.

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 local authority has increased its support for the school and their support is already having an impact. It has brokered support with a local pupil referral unit to provide training for staff in effective behaviour management. Links have been made with a number of local good and outstanding schools with the intention of creating a 'cluster' of small schools to offer mutual support. The local authority has reviewed governance and regularly report back to governors about standards. However, the review of governance and the school improvement partner's reports are not sufficiently evaluative to inform governors precisely what the issues are and what needs to be done to improve them.

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

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon
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
- the academy chain where relevant
- Diocese – for voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) if the school has a sixth form
- The person or body responsible for appointing foundation governors if the school has a foundation
- The lead inspector.