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11 September 2014

Mr Danny Mellor
Headteacher
Peel Brow School
Ramsbottom
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Lancashire
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Dear Mr Mellor

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Peel Brow School, Bury

Following my visit to your school on 10 September 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 May 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:

- identify the reasons for underperformance in Key Stage 1 and use this information to plan effective and focused strategies to raise the achievement of younger pupils
- develop the role of all leaders so they have the skills and knowledge to help improve teaching in all subjects across the school
- develop pupils' tolerance of and respect for individual differences between each other
- audit the strengths and weaknesses of the newly formed governing body and use this information to plan a course of action to improve governance.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, the deputy headteacher, two senior and two middle leaders, three members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I also chatted to a small group of older pupils to gain their views about the changes in the school. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Your most recent school data, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Years 2 and 6, were considered. I also looked at records of your checks on teaching and a sample of subject leaders' folders. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books.

Context

There has been considerable change since the May inspection. The Year 2 teacher left at the end of the summer term. Last minute financial constraints meant this member of staff was not replaced. As a result, teaching groups have been re-organised and almost every teacher has moved to a different year group. The Nursery and Reception children are together in one class. Years 3, 4 and 5 pupils are taught as single-age classes in the morning and split into two mixed-age teaching groups in the afternoon. Three new governors have been appointed to the governing body.

Main findings

No-one is quibbling about the findings from the recent inspection. You, staff and governors all agree the judgements are spot on and paint a fair picture of the school. Everyone is standing shoulder-to-shoulder; all share your determination to improve and no-one is in doubt about what needs to change quickly to make sure the school is judged good at the next inspection.

Your clear action plan shows you know what needs to happen next. You have avoided a knee-jerk reaction and kept hold of the strategies that are proving to be successful. These actions are bearing fruit. The 2014 unvalidated results for Year 6 are the best the school has gained in recent years. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics improved to match, and sometime exceed, the national average because more pupils made at least expected progress from their starting points. You have been particularly successful in tackling achievement gaps between groups. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs made strong progress and achieved as well as all pupils in the country in reading and mathematics. Last year, pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium funding were over a year behind their classmates. This is no longer the case and the gap is closing quickly.

This positive improvement is not reflected everywhere. Standards at the end of Year 2 remain stubbornly low and not all more-able pupils are making the necessary strides to help them soar. Improving Key Stage 1 achievement lacks specific attention in your action plan and in the plans written by other leaders. No-one has sat down and really thought about the reasons why younger pupils fare less well and

then set about putting strategies into place to lift the achievement of pupils in Years 1 and 2.

Improving teaching is your number one priority. You are building on the work from last year so that teachers work together closely; observe each other teach; plan together and share expertise. You are also exploiting all of the training opportunities available through the local authority and a neighbouring school to update and refresh teachers' skills. All of the systems are in place to make sure teachers know what is expected of them. The bread and butter of the job is explicit in your renewed guidance on teaching, marking and managing pupils' behaviour. Classrooms are set out just as you want and there are signs that teachers are following the new marking policy. You have set out your stall for staff and pupils, but, as you recognise, all leaders will need to check, and check again, to make sure everyone is following your lead.

You have clear procedures in place for checking on teaching. This is not new. Leaders have spent time and energy diligently visiting lessons, looking at pupils' books and scrutinising data. However, this work has not made a big enough difference in the past because feedback to teachers has been too positive and superficial. No-one has really drilled down to identify the specific areas of improvement for each individual member of staff. This is the nub of the matter and a key reason why the school did not make the leap to good at the last inspection. Everyone is keenly aware of this shortcoming and there are signs that you are tightening up the systems. Nonetheless, your recent checks on teaching are still overwhelmingly positive and targets for improvement lack precision and detail. Consequently, teachers are not crystal clear on what they need to do to raise their game on a day-to-day basis.

Middle leaders are on board and are happy to follow your direction. The English and mathematics leaders are leading the way, providing training and support for staff, reporting to governors and taking a greater role in checking on teaching. The work of other subject leaders in promoting whole-school policies and improving teaching is lagging behind.

Pupils are noticing the changes in the school. They say their work is much better; neither too hard nor too easy and they no longer have to tread water when they finish tasks waiting for others to catch-up. Their views about behaviour are more variable. They say the new behaviour policy has made a difference to behaviour during lessons; they can concentrate and work hard without disruption. However, this is not having the same impact in the playground. Name-calling sometimes happens because not all pupils respect differences in how pupils look or how easy or hard some pupils find their work.

The governing body is settling in after a period of change; new governors are being brought into the fold quickly. Challenging questions are being asked. Governors want to see as well as hear about the school's progress. As a result they are unstinting in their commitment and generous with the time they devote to the school. They want to play their part in the school's improvement. As a result, they are honest about

their effectiveness and have already sought external support to help them improve. However, they are in the early stages of auditing their collective strengths and weaknesses and designing a clear plan of action to enhance their skills and knowledge.

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

Sustained and effective support from the local authority has been welcomed by everyone. The influence of local authority officers is evident in many aspects of the school's success. Coordinated support from English and mathematics consultants has helped equip subject leaders with the skills to drive forward these subjects. The support you and your senior leaders received by officers has been particularly useful in making sure your judgements on teaching are accurate. Detailed data provided by the local authority has been invaluable in helping you and the governors gain a speedy view of the 2014 results in the absence of nationally published information. The local authority is confident the school will make the move to good and has committed appropriate support and expertise to help you on this journey.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector