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Paul Sockett
Headteacher
Bridstow CofE Primary School
Bridstow
Ross-on-Wye
HR9 6PZ

Dear Mr Sockett

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bridstow CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 1 October 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:

- ensure that more pupils make good progress in writing
- ensure that the checks that are made on the quality of teaching are frequent, rigorous and provide senior leaders and governors with evidence of the improvements being made
- ensure that governors check for themselves on the improvements that are being made
- share the effective marking practice evident in Years 3 and 4 to maximise the progress that pupils in all classes make

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you and the assistant headteacher, three representatives of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority

and a representative of the Diocese to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated along with other documents relating to school improvement including records of governor visits to the school and records of checks made on the quality of teaching. We also made visits to each classroom to talk to pupils and look at the work in their books.

Context

Since the inspection in March there have been no staffing changes. One governor has retired. One teacher will start maternity leave at the end of October and you are in the process of appointing a teacher to cover this absence.

Main findings

The school action plan is sharply focussed on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. It sets out clearly what actions are to be taken and how success is to be measured. The plan states how governors will be informed about school improvement, however governors are not yet fully included in all aspects of checking on this for themselves. Many of the actions are to be led by you, however your capacity to effect rapid improvements is limited by your teaching commitments which account for almost 50% of the week. Governors who spoke to me are aware of this and intend to make this a priority for discussion.

A range of appropriate strategies have been implemented in order to address the areas for development identified in the recent inspection, many of which have the potential to secure improvement. For example staff have received training on 'Talk for Writing' and on 'assertive mentoring' in mathematics. Teachers have also benefitted from visiting other schools to observe good practice and the school has joined a local learning network in the Wye Valley to increase the range of expertise you have access to. Although a timetable for checking on the success of these actions has been introduced, you have limited evidence of how much difference these strategies have made. The English and mathematics subject leaders have benefitted from training on how to make checks on the quality of teaching in their subject. They have been allocated some responsibilities in the action plan but have not yet begun to make their checks.

You have rightly focussed actions on the improvement of writing. As a result, at the end of Year 6 in 2013, almost all pupils made the progress that is expected. However, too few pupils made good progress. School data show that this is replicated across the school and should be addressed as a matter of urgency to ensure that all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Teachers are now using a range of resources to provide a higher level of challenge for the more able and additional support for the less able. As yet you have not measured the success of this. During my visit to Reception class the teacher and the teaching assistant were using questioning effectively to support the less able children and extend the thinking of the more-able.

The updated marking and feedback policy is being used across the school with all teachers highlighting successes in green and improvement points in pink. Marking is particularly effective in Years 3 and 4, where pupils receive precise advice on how to improve their work. Pupils are expected to respond to this advice by improving their work or completing the task that has been set. During my visits to classrooms it was apparent that most pupils taking more care with the presentation of their work.

The curriculum has been reviewed in order to ensure that it is exciting and stimulating for pupils. Four underlying principles have been identified on which the curriculum is built – creativity, technology, environmental awareness and exploring culture. Older pupils explained that learning in mathematics is fun because 'we play games and investigate things' and were enthusiastic about dressing up as Victorians for their forthcoming trip. They were less enthusiastic about their writing lessons.

In order to ensure that pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe when using the internet you have organised the NSPCC to visit the school and provide lessons for all pupils. You have implemented a new scheme of work for computing in line with the new National Curriculum which includes an element of e-safety teaching in each year group. Older pupils could say what they would do if they accessed something online that worried them and could explain some of the rules they have learned about protecting their personal information.

The governors who spoke to me had a good level of understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and demonstrated detailed knowledge of the actions that are being taken to address the areas for improvement. They are realistic about the challenges facing the school and showed clear ambition for the school to improve to at least good as quickly as possible. The Chair of the Governing Body is providing clear direction and a sense of urgency to make improvements in her leadership of the governors. She is implementing appropriate systems to ensure that governors visit the school regularly, with a clear focus, to measure the impact of the actions being taken to improve the school. Committees have been reorganised to enable governors to have a sharper focus on checking on improvements and holding senior leaders to account. The timetable for meetings has been reorganised to ensure that committees can report their findings into full governor meetings.

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 advisor and the Diocesan advisor are working together to support the school and intend to visit the school on a frequent basis although this programme of support is yet to begin. Plans are in place to partner Bridstow Primary with another local good or outstanding school in order to support improvement.

An external consultant is also used to provide an appropriate range of support to the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Rachel Howie
Her Majesty's Inspector