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Ms Georgina Harland
Headteacher
Bewcastle School
Bewcastle
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Cumbria
CA6 6PF

Dear Mrs Harland

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bewcastle School, Cumbria

Following my visit to your school on 30 September 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on the 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 May 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its previous section 5 inspection the school was also judged to require improvement.

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:

- agree a timetable of monitoring and leadership activities for all leaders, specifying the time allocated and expected outcomes
- develop action plans for English, mathematics and special educational needs, outlining priorities and the intended impact on pupils' achievement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, both teachers and four members of the governing body including the Chair. I had a telephone conversation with the local authority general adviser and talked to pupils during lessons and at lunch-time. The school improvement plans were evaluated and I looked at your progress tracking. I visited both classrooms during lessons and sampled pupils' work.

Context

Since the last inspection, a Nursery class has been opened and a teaching assistant has been moved from Key Stage 2 to support teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Main findings

Most of the areas identified as requiring improvement refer to leadership and management at all levels, including governance. It is heartening that the actions you have taken previously have maintained good teaching, achievement and behaviour. The post-Ofsted plan has been amended appropriately. The current school improvement plan has been completed successfully and requires updating. However you have not wasted any time in taking action to develop leadership roles and improve systems to track achievement and attendance.

You have developed the system to track pupils' progress effectively. The inclusion of Key Stage 1 progress data enables all staff and governors to monitor the progress of each pupil from their starting points on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage. You have set challenging targets and are making sure that pupils who are not making expected progress receive the support they need early so they catch-up quickly. You are adapting systems appropriately to take account of national curriculum age-related expectations and assessing without levels. The progress tracking provides a good basis for the regular meetings you have established to discuss each pupil's progress. All staff agree that these meetings are useful to share ideas and make sure teaching builds on prior learning effectively. The detailed logs you have introduced to monitor attendance are helpful and attendance is high so far this year.

Everybody is very clear about their responsibilities since the start of September. Teachers are enthusiastic about the developments in their leadership roles and are committed to playing their part. There is a real sense of teamwork in the school now. It would be helpful to establish a timetable for all leaders so it is clear when they will be carrying out monitoring activities, such as work scrutiny and reporting to governors. Leaders would also benefit from brief action plans outlining the priorities in English, mathematics and special educational needs provision and the intended impact of actions.

The full review of governance has supported governors to increase their contribution to improvement. They have a good range of expertise and the restructuring into three committees is working well to ensure all are well informed and participate fully. Detailed records of meetings are ensuring actions are carried through. The targets to manage the performance of the headteacher and other staff have been sharpened, with an appropriate focus on pupils' progress and leadership responsibilities.

Teachers' marking is providing pupils with more precise points for improvement and pupils say they find it helpful. We talked about the challenge of following up marking in the Key Stage 2 class where there are two teachers. The teacher's suggestion to use separate books for different topics covered in mathematics is helpful. We also talked about the need to provide pupils with strategies to self-correct as well as correcting errors for them.

The website has been updated but there are still some omissions that need to be addressed immediately, including information about admissions, curriculum, the behaviour policy and the special educational needs information report. All requirements are met with regards to these policies but they are not yet accessible on the website.

You have made sure that the impetus for change has been sustained and staff and governors have a strong drive to build on the improvements acknowledged at the last inspection. Pupils enjoy school; they say their teachers know them really well, make sure work is interesting and keep them safe.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. We agreed that a support visit would be helpful in March 2015, at which point I will meet with the full Governing Body and conduct a full work scrutiny with staff.

External support

The school is drawing upon external support effectively. The local authority adviser has provided good support to improve governance. The headteacher has initiated partnership working with other schools in the area, providing opportunities for the headteacher to work with colleagues and developing links for subject leaders.

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

Yours sincerely

Jean Olsson-Law

Her Majesty's Inspector