

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 1231231
Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mr Robert Blanchet
Headteacher
Briercliffe Primary School
Delamere Road
Briercliffe
Burnley
Lancashire
BB10 2JU

Dear Mr Blanchet

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Briercliffe Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 2 October 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.

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:

- review the effectiveness of the organisation of classes in Key Stage 2
- ensure that all teachers provide effective models for pupils regarding the use of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, your deputy headteacher and other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated, along with your most recent report to the governing body and data relating to the progress of pupils currently on roll. You accompanied me on brief visits to all classes.

Context

There have been no changes in personnel since the section 5 inspection, which judged the school to require improvement. Pupil numbers have risen: there are now 304 on roll. The governing body is undergoing a process of reconstitution.

Main findings

You had only been in post for a few days at the time of the section 5 inspection. You and your deputy, who is in her second year at the school, have taken the inspection findings as a baseline for swift improvement and embarked on a rigorous programme of well-considered change. You have identified the need for more open, honest reflection involving the whole school community. To this end, shortly after the inspection report was published, you and your governors held meetings with parents to discuss inspectors' findings and outline your proposed improvements. Parents welcomed this opportunity, which is characteristic of your open style of communication, further exemplified by the relocation of your office to an accessible place in the school building. You and your deputy have developed the leadership skills of other staff through modelling behaviours and putting in place clear systems and procedures to ensure that teachers use the data available to them to evaluate pupils' progress and plan the next steps in their learning. You combine steely determination with humanity and are working hard to coach staff in order that they can realise the school as a place where 'in work and play we are our best.'

The school improvement plan includes precise detail of actions to be taken, by whom and with what intended impact. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements are clearly stated and the plan is kept in check by you, other leaders, governors and local authority. You all recognise that achievement is not good: 2014 outcomes showed improvement at Key Stage 1 but were too low by the end of Key Stage 2, especially in writing. You know that these below-average standards of attainment are due to the variability in the quality of teaching over time and you are taking steps to rectify this. Staff are working hard to embed the 'non-negotiables' you have introduced that define expectations of everyone's practice.

The roles of the senior leadership team have been realigned to ensure that workloads are equitable and that the school's efforts to improve the quality of teaching are shared. Senior leaders show conviction and resilience: they are determined that Briercliffe will be a good school at its next inspection and are refreshed by your vision and drive. Changes have been made to the school's organisation that have yielded immediate benefits: time has been provided for teachers who share the teaching of particular classes to meet together so that they can plan collaboratively and better understand the needs and progress of individual children. Weekly pupils' progress meetings track the impact of interventions and approaches to raise achievement and there is a much tighter accountability for all pupils' achievement.

Actions to improve pupils' writing have been decided and training for staff is being undertaken. Pupils in upper Key Stage two spoke enthusiastically about their 'survival' narratives, based on *Robinson Crusoe* but with scope for individual twists and adaptations. They were keen to use their 'polishing pens' to edit their writing. In Key Stage 1 there was much excitement about the challenge of writing a recipe for 'boy soup.' Pupils' writing has been energised by the development of activities that have 'real' audiences and purposes.

The cross-school use of 'bronze, silver and gold' targets has increased pupils' aspirations, and the 'morning challenges' have prompted an industrious start to the day. Positive behaviour for learning, combined with good attendance mean that pupils present no barriers to a culture of raised ambition. In mathematics, there is evidence of pupils being involved in more practical activities, such as lower Key Stage 2 where pupils enjoyed finding different angles around the classroom, however not all of them were clear about how to record their work or how to determine whether angles were smaller or greater than ninety degrees. Teachers are becoming more adept at looking critically at pupils' learning and beginning to make adaptations.

Governance has been strengthened. As well as engaging with external reviews of their function and the school's use of pupil premium, governors have conducted a skills audit and are in the process of reconstitution. They are well aware of the school's priorities and recognise their crucial role in securing improvement. Their funding decisions are directly related to raising achievement. Governors feel well-informed and appreciate your reports which are presented in a consistent, comprehensible way that prompts their insightful questioning.

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 is receiving proportionate, good quality support from the local authority. This has included a thorough audit of teaching from the monitoring and intervention team (MIT) adviser. This audit clearly identified what needs to be done to ensure that teaching becomes consistently at least good within this academic year. The audit has enabled resources to be deployed in a targeted way. A teaching and learning consultant is supporting the school and his first priority is to improve the quality of teaching in lower Key Stage 2. Local authority staff have provided the school with in-service training that has been welcomed by staff and includes teaching assistants as valued members of the school team. The MIT adviser has undertaken a review of the governors' spending of pupil premium funding, and their procedures for analysing and reporting its impact. This has sharpened governors' awareness of the intended use of this resource and enabled them to provide you with informed challenge. An external review of governance has been undertaken, led by a local authority officer. The MIT adviser, along with the school adviser, attends meetings of the standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body. The school has also commissioned an external consultant to support staff in improving the teaching of writing. This consultant's reports are shared with the local authority advisers so that consistent messages are ensured.

The school has emerged from a period of relative isolation to one of greater collaboration. You have established positive relationships with local headteachers to enable the sharing of good practice and problem-solving. You, your deputy and governors have attended recent 'Through the Lens' training provided by Her Majesty's Inspectors.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector