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Mrs Jayne Verity
Headteacher
Brookfield Community Primary School
Watling Street Road
Preston
Lancashire
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Dear Mrs Verity

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Brookfield Community Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 17 October 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 the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs and use this information to plan effective and focused strategies to narrow achievement gaps across the school
- with the support of the local authority review the effectiveness of the pupil premium funding to ensure resources are used to improve outcomes for this group of pupils
- develop the induction and training programme for governors so new members can grasp their role quickly and make a full and positive contribution to the governing body's work
- review the subject leaders' action plans to ensure strategies for improvement link to issues raised by external and internal data.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with yourself, two deputy headteachers, two members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I met with a small group of older pupils to gather 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 minutes from governing body meetings. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils, observe them at work and to look at their books.

Context

Two teachers left school at the end of the summer term. They have been replaced by two new teachers and two teachers have returned from long term absence. The leadership team has been restructured. Since September, the teacher on loan from a local school has been employed by Brookfield as deputy headteacher. This post will last for one year. A Key Stage 1 leader has been appointed. There are three vacancies on the governing body. At the time of my visit, one teacher was absent.

Main findings

You, the staff and the governors view the recent inspection as a positive experience. It is helping everyone to draw a line in the sand; to acknowledge what has worked well in the past and reflect honestly on the main reasons why the school did not make the leap to good this time around. No-one is making excuses or dwelling on the past. Everyone shares a renewed determination not to make the same mistakes. All accept that change, no matter how difficult or demanding, is necessary to put the interests of Brookfield pupils at the centre of the school's work. As a result, governors are in no doubt about the part they need to play in the improvement journey, senior leaders know what is expected of them and staff are following whole-school policies and procedures to the letter. You all faced a difficult summer term due to exceptional circumstances. Nonetheless, everyone rallied around and although progress during this period may not have been as swift as you wanted, you still delivered on your planned actions.

Although there is much to do to become good at the next inspection, firmer foundations are in place on which to build future success. Your actions are beginning to bear fruit. The unvalidated 2014 results show the positive impact of your work in some parts of the school. Early Years Foundation Stage continues to be a strength. The number of children reaching the levels expected for their age is improving year-on-year meaning children are ready and able to take on the challenges of Year 1. Pupils' phonic skills (the sounds that letters make) continue to improve and the standards gained by Year 2 pupils are the best the school has enjoyed for a long time. In contrast, Year 6 pupils fared less well. Despite improvements in reading, and more pupils reaching the higher levels in mathematics, achievement in writing fell, so standards remain below average. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers narrowed, but this is not a convincing cause for celebration as these

pupils lag behind their classmates by over a year. Your use of the funding for pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is not making enough of a difference. Disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs made variable progress from their starting points. However, the standards they gained by the time they left the school do not give them enough of a fighting chance to succeed in secondary school.

The school is no longer on such shaky ground, because instances of staff absence are reducing. There are less temporary teachers in classrooms than has previously been the case. This means you are having greater success in tackling weaknesses in teaching because the same teachers cross the threshold each and every day. You have improved the strategies for recruiting new staff to make sure you get the right people for the job. Detailed guidance for new staff means they are hitting the ground running; valuable teaching time is not being wasted while these teachers get up to speed with the Brookfield way of working.

Teaching is beginning to get better. Pupils' books show an improving picture in the quality, quantity and presentation of work which points to teachers' higher expectations and pupils' positive attitudes to their work. A focus on basic skills is helping to close the yawning gaps some pupils have due to weaker teaching in the past. Pupils have a much greater sense of what they need to do improve because teachers are becoming increasingly effective at marking pupils' work.

The recent inspection is helping you to accept that you cannot do everything yourself. This has led to a restructure of roles and responsibilities so the load is more evenly shared across all leaders. Consequently, you are beginning to spend more time concentrating on the core business of improving teaching. With the support of the local leader in education, checks on teaching are increasingly insightful and lead to precise areas for improvement, and more importantly, tailored programmes of training for individual staff.

Members of the new leadership team are flourishing under the opportunity to make a difference. They know the strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility because they are involved in checking teaching and looking closely at data about pupils' progress. They are taking the right action to tackle shortcomings head-on. There are clear signs of success. Pupils' achievement in reading is improving across the school because leaders spent time and energy finding out the root causes for the lacklustre performance in results last year. Discussion with pupils revealed a lack of interest in the reading resources and too few opportunities to read and listen to others reading. Swift action means reading resources have been replenished and reading for purpose and pleasure happens in every classroom. Pupils are glowing in their praise for this action, which is encouraging them to read every day and try out new and unfamiliar authors. The teaching of writing is showing signs of improvement too. A new way of teaching is encouraging younger pupils to put pen to paper and teachers are more skilled at making sure they data they hold on pupils' progress is accurate. However, not all leaders are forging ahead as quickly. Slower inroads are being made into lifting the teaching of mathematics. Not enough has happened to get to the bottom of why disadvantaged pupils,

disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs achieve less well than their classmates.

Your school improvement plan is detailed and provides a clear route to success. This is not true for the plans produced by subject leaders. While these plans show what needs to happen, data is not used well enough to identify the key weaknesses in teaching and learning to drive improvement strategies. Governors do not have a role in checking the difference these leaders are making across the school.

Governors have a good grasp of their role and an accurate view of the school. They are working fruitfully with the local authority to extend their level of challenge to senior leaders so they are able to support the school effectively when external support reduces. Vacancies on the governing body are being viewed as an opportunity, rather than a cause for concern, because governors are able to recruit new members with the right skills and expertise. However, as you recognise, your induction and training programmes need to ensure new governors can hit the ground running so progress does not falter.

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 is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with you on your journey to good. It responds well to your requests, providing effective and timely support which is tailored to the needs of the school. The work of the local leader in education is particularly successful. This professional has supported you in reviewing the processes for appointing new staff; is helping you provide teachers with clear pointers for improvement through checks on teaching and is forging links with other schools so teachers can learn from best practice. You are using a local authority teaching and learning consultant to work with individual teachers on any issues which are getting in the way of pupils' making stronger progress. Good support from another officer has helped governors raise their game while good quality information produced by the local authority is helping everyone get to grips with the issues raised by the 2014 results in the absence of national data.

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

Yours sincerely

Joanne Olsson
Her Majesty's Inspector