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16 October 2014

Mr Ian Wilson
Headteacher
Burnley St Stephen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School
Woodgrove Road
Burnley
Lancashire
BB11 3EJ

Dear Mr Wilson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Burnley St Stephen's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 15 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 June 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 your priority of improving the quality of pupils' writing is made explicit in displays throughout school in order that pupils see examples of good work, have high expectations re-enforced and consolidate their understanding of writing for different purposes and audiences
- further develop the school's processes for the scrutiny of pupils' work so that this generates evidence of pupils' progress over time.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, two governors including the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, and a representative of

the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. Brief visits were made to all classes and samples of pupils' work were scrutinised. Various documents were considered, including reports provided by local authority advisers, governing body meeting minutes, new school policies, records of visits to other schools and records of monitoring that you have undertaken.

Context

Three new teaching assistants have been recruited. One of these provides cover for a member of staff who is on maternity leave while the other two are additional temporary posts. One governor has resigned and a new governor has been appointed. Pupil numbers have remained stable.

Main findings

You were disappointed by the outcome of the inspection that took place in June 2014 and have taken swift action to address the areas for improvement that inspectors identified. You are proud of the school and determined that it should get to good again rapidly.

The school's improvement plan gives leaders, governors and staff a clear route map. The plan includes well-defined actions, realistic timescales and aspirational success criteria. Alongside this you are keeping a record of improvement activity since the last inspection. The roles of school leaders, governors and the local authority have been defined with regard to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the plan.

Standards rose in 2014 and pupils left with much better results at the end of Key Stage 2 than in the previous year; indeed the results were the best in the school's recent history. Almost all pupils made expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics and the proportions exceeding expected progress compared favourably with the national average for 2013. Your analysis indicates that the gaps in performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing: a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils attained level 5 in reading and writing than non-disadvantaged.

The proportion of pupils in Year 1 attaining the national expectation in phonics (the sounds made by letters) also rose in comparison with 2013. Pupils attained better in Key Stage 1 overall than in the previous year, although very few attained the higher level 3 in writing.

The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development in Reception class improved in 2014 but remained below average. You recognise that improving the quality of early years is a key priority. To this end you are supporting the Reception teacher's development of a range of activities, including those which are directed by

adults and those chosen by pupils themselves, so that there are more opportunities for pupils to practise their writing.

The increasingly positive picture of achievement throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 is evident in the school's tracking of current pupils' progress. Where you have identified gaps in pupils' achievement, you are providing additional support within and outside lessons. Your monitoring of pupils' progress is more rigorous and tightly defined.

You have raised the bar for teachers in terms of your expectations of how they should plan for and assess pupils' learning and teachers are responding with concerted determination. You have revised your approach to planning in line with the new national curriculum and have orchestrated support for teachers from a local authority consultant. This support includes individual coaching sessions so that everyone is clear about the criteria for effective teaching and how these should be underpinned by planning that takes into account the achievement profiles of different groups of pupils, as well as expectations of the subject knowledge and skills that are to be developed in different year groups.

The school's marking and feedback policy has been revised and improved so that it gives consistent guidance to teachers on how they should provide feedback to pupils, including through posing additional questions or challenges to them. Your monitoring of teachers' application of this policy indicates that it is not yet fully embedded, however the best examples of marking include direct challenges to pupils which they respond to conscientiously during 'fix it' time; for instance year 5 pupils in mathematics have paid close attention to the comments highlighted in green by their teacher.

The school's focus for improvement this term is writing: teachers are ensuring that pupils undertake more extended writing in a range of subjects. Year 2 pupils have produced lively poems demonstrating their understanding of nouns, verbs and adjectives that have been collated into a book that they can share. In Year 5 pupils showed their historical understanding through writing diary extracts from Anglo-Saxons and letters from Beowulf. Pupils' exercise books show that they are becoming more productive and that their writing stamina is increasing, however, there is relatively little pupils' work displayed around school that would act as a statement of teachers' expectations, exemplification of writing for different purposes and audiences and a celebration of high standards.

You are supported effectively by your senior leadership team. You have recognised the breadth and depth of their work by providing them with increased non-teaching time to complete leadership and management activities. This enables them to support colleagues and reflect on the practice they observe in school.

The work of the governing body has been strengthened by the development of a standards and effectiveness committee which monitors the school's achievement of

key milestones on its journey to becoming good again. This committee includes a number of governors with educational expertise. The Vice Chair of Governors has recently undertaken monitoring jointly with you. This included holding discussions with pupils and reviewing their work in exercise books. Pupils were positive about the newly-introduced 'fix it' time and about teachers' use of highlighted comments to indicate precisely what they needed to improve in their work. The parent governor with whom I spoke confirmed that more is being expected of pupils now and that the learning targets which pupils now take home are personalised and helpful. Although an external review of governance was not explicitly required as a result of the section 5 inspection, governors have arranged for this to take place. They have completed a skills audit and reviewed their roles. Governors have undertaken training provided by the local authority and accompanied you on a 'Getting to Good' conference led by her Majesty's Inspectors.

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 providing a comprehensive, well-targeted programme of support that addresses all the areas for improvement identified at the most recent inspection. An adviser has supported you in ensuring that your school improvement plan is sharply focused. Consultancy support is clearly focused on meeting individual teachers' needs, following an audit undertaken by the Monitoring and Intervention Team (MIT). This support has helped teachers to plan and assess pupils' learning in line with the new national curriculum. A consultant is working alongside the Reception teacher. Links have been made with schools where there is high quality practice, including in early years provision and outcomes. A literacy consultant is supporting the development of writing. An adviser attends the standards and effectiveness committee of the governing body to ensure that governors have clear insight on the work of the school and provide appropriate support and challenge.

The support provided by the MIT and consultants is intensive but not overwhelming. Early indications are that it is having demonstrable impact on increasing the rigour of senior leaders' practice in monitoring and evaluation as well as improving teaching.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector