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22 January 2015

Mrs Jane Foster
Interim Headteacher
Bisham CofE Primary School
Church Lane
Bisham
Marlow
SL7 1RW

Dear Mrs Foster

Special measures monitoring inspection of Bisham CofE Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 January 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in September 2014.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with you and a previous interim headteacher, three representatives of the local authority and one from the diocese, staff and parents and carers. I evaluated the local authority's statement of action and the school's development plan. I also looked at other key documents including the school's records of checks on adults who work with children. During the day, I walked around the school to check on the safety of the site, briefly visited each class and talked informally with pupils.

Context

Two local headteachers took over the temporary leadership and management of the school at the end of November. You joined the school on 19 January 2015 as the full-time interim headteacher until the end of the school year. The governing body resigned at the end of November. An application for an Interim Executive Board (IEB) is pending.

Three of the four classes are covered by supply teachers because staff have left or are absent. Eighteen pupils have left the school since the inspection.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

There has been no notable progress against most of the points for improvement identified by inspectors in September 2014. Time was wasted immediately after the inspection because leaders did not act with enough urgency to bring about the improvements needed. So far, new leaders have not been able to make up for lost time. Quite rightly, since their arrival, the interim headteachers have prioritised day-to-day management matters such as recruiting staff and dealing with parents' and carers' concerns. Some, but by no means all, of the health and safety issues have been addressed. The school's record of checks on adults who work with children now meets statutory requirements.

The local authority has taken appropriate action to strengthen the leadership of the school. It exercised its statutory powers to suspend the governing body's management of the school's budget and arranged for two local headteachers to take over the leadership and management of the school last term. Subsequently, the local authority put firmer arrangements in place by appointing you as full-time interim headteacher for two terms. You joined the school two days before this inspection. One of the original interim headteachers is currently working alongside you to smooth the transition. Both will continue to provide support for particular aspects of the school's improvement work. Local authority officers met with governors in November, who agreed that the governing body should be replaced by an IEB. The school is currently without any formal governance arrangements. Governors resigned almost immediately and the local authority waited to submit its application for an IEB until your appointment was confirmed. The IEB has yet to be officially confirmed or start its work, but evidence suggests that members have a good mix of experience and skills. Importantly, they include a parent representative.

The local authority's statement of action sets out clearly the steps it took before and immediately after the inspection to improve the school, along with those it intends to take. The actions are the right ones and the resources allocated are appropriate. Occasionally, however, the plan is not specific enough about what will happen and when, or sufficiently precise about resources and success measures to avoid any ambiguity. The external review of governance is not required due to the formation of the IEB.

The school's development plan is a useful starting point, in that it sets out to achieve what is expected of a good school. In its current form, it is not realistic. It depends on having experienced middle leaders with the expertise to lead improvements in teaching and learning. This is not the case. The plan is not manageable because it lacks detail about timescales, responsibilities for leading initiatives, checking on progress and evaluating impact, and resources. It is early days, but you already have a clear picture of what needs to happen and when. You understand the need to balance urgency with rigour and you have started to adjust plans accordingly.

The implementation of both plans, and support from the diocese, has been delayed. This is largely because leaders have had to use a high number of temporary staff to cover those who have left or are absent. As such, work to begin improving teaching and learning has not been possible. Staffing is more stable now, although in the first instance only until the end of the school year and not in one class. Decisions need to be made about the leadership structure in the longer term. With so many new staff, it is essential that day-to-day systems are established to ensure pupils' safety at all times. Staff and pupils need to be clear about daily routines and classroom expectations so they are consistent in their approach.

The local authority's statement of action sets out what school leaders and local authority officers at different levels will do and how they will be held to account for the school's progress. It is important that these mechanisms are used to get plans back on track. Given the mixed views of parents and carers, clear communication about plans and progress will be essential.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's development plan is not fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint Newly Qualified Teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Director of Children's Services for Windsor and Maidenhead and the Diocese of Oxford. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alison Bradley
Her Majesty's Inspector