

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 566850
Direct F 01695 729320
Direct email:
dmccarrick@cfbt.com



29 January 2015

Mr Mike Mitchell
Headteacher
Seven Stars Primary School Upton
Peacock Hall Road
Leyland
Lancashire
PR25 1TD

Dear Mr Mitchell

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Seven Stars Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2015, 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 October 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 the weight of responsibility for driving improvement is shared more evenly by:
 - helping subject leaders put their recent training into action quickly so they are driving improvements to teaching across the school
 - organising an external review of governance to help governors form a clear plan of action to improve their effectiveness
- tackle the weaknesses in pupils' handwriting and spelling so gaps in basic skills close quickly and ensure pupils have more opportunities to write at length
- tighten the strategies to support the current Year 6 class to help these pupils reach their challenging targets.

Evidence

During my visit, meetings were held with you, five senior and middle leaders, two members of the governing body and two representatives from the local authority. I also chatted to a small group of older pupils to gather their views about the changes in the school. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I considered your most recent school information on pupils' achievement, including the 2014 unvalidated results for Year 2 and Year 6. 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

Since the October inspection, the deputy headteacher and the Reception teacher have left the school. The Year 6 teacher is on extended leave. A new Reception teacher and two temporary teachers took up post in January 2015.

Main findings

You have not wasted any time in getting to grips with the findings from the recent inspection. You set about tackling the key shortcomings as soon as the inspectors left your school in October. Despite almost half of the teaching staff joining the school in January, you are not using this as an excuse. Disruption in staffing is not getting in the way of improving teaching and lifting pupils' achievement. As a result, you are laying the foundations on which to build future success. Your well written action plan shows you know what to do to bring about improvement. Your planned actions to improve teaching and leadership are spot-on and you are using the wide range of external support wisely to help you move forward.

You know the inspection judgement is accurate; not everyone is as convinced. Nonetheless, staff and governors are pulling together towards a common goal. They are confident you can lead the way and everyone is on board for the journey ahead. You know there is a need for change. You are under no illusions that continuing with strategies that have not brought about success in the past will not serve the school well in the future. Nevertheless, you are carrying a heavy burden; responsibility for improving the school is not spread evenly among all leaders. This has not held you up in the short term. However, in the long term, this poses a potential barrier to the school's speedy recovery.

Your work to date is beginning to reap rewards. Recent changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage mean children are more interested in their learning inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics has been refreshed along with whole-school policies for teaching number. Consequently, pupils are more confident in tackling calculations and achievement in mathematics is beginning to rise in most classes. Almost all teachers are striving to follow the updated marking policy. However, there is still a way to go to make sure all teachers provide pupils with meaningful next steps to help them improve their learning.

You are setting your stall out clearly for teachers. The renewed teaching policy lays out your expectations of teaching staff and what should happen in classrooms each and every day. Some teachers have got the message quickly. In these classes, pupils work purposefully, produce quality work and make strong gains in their learning. Not all teachers are getting to grips with the new way of working as swiftly. Some pupils are not expected to work hard enough for their age or ability. You are helping teachers to raise their game through suitable training and opportunities for staff to work together to share their expertise. New teachers are being brought into the fold quickly, but there is more to do to ensure everyone is following the Seven Stars approach to teaching and learning.

You current data on pupils' achievement show the tide is turning and more pupils are making expected progress. Nonetheless, there is a long haul ahead to wipe out the bumpy ride pupils typically experience as they move throughout school. In some classes pupils forge ahead quickly, making strong gains in their learning; in other classes they tread water. Year 6 pupils are getting close attention, but their books show they have quite a journey to make if they are to reach their challenging end of year targets. Across the rest of the school, some pupils are living with gaps in their spelling and handwriting skills which are holding them back. Pupils' success in writing is hampered by too few opportunities to write at length.

Subject leaders are receiving extensive support and training to build their confidence and gain the skills for the job. They are beginning to get to grips with performance data and they have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in their subject areas. However, they are only just off the starting blocks in their efforts to improve teaching. The English and mathematics subject leaders are checking pupils' books more closely, but this strategy is not getting to the heart of the matter. This is because subject leaders focus too much on whether teachers are following policies rather than examining the quality of pupils' learning over time. The feedback teachers receive is not sharp enough to help them improve their teaching skills. Subject leaders do not go back and make sure their advice and guidance is being followed by all teachers.

The governing body are showing their determination to improve through the time and energy they are investing in training to extend their skills. As a result, they have a better grasp of school data which is helping them to ask more searching questions than in the past. Nonetheless, they have been slow to get going in other areas. The special committee they have set up to keep an eye on the school's progress is yet to meet. They have not taken enough responsibility for planning the actions they will take to improve governance. Governors are in the very early stages of setting up the procedures for visiting school more frequently to gather their own first-hand evidence of progress. Recent changes to the governing body means the time is right for governance to be externally reviewed.

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 responded quickly to the inspection judgement to ensure you have the right support to aid the school's recovery. Support is extensive and effective because it is matched closely to the school's weaknesses and adds value to your action plan. You appreciate and trust the advice of local authority officers who are standing shoulder-to-shoulder with you on your journey. The work of officers with early years expertise has helped to get the much needed improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage off to a good start. Subject leaders are benefitting from training and the opportunity to work with their counterparts in your partner school. A teaching and learning audit led by the local authority has helped everyone gain an accurate view of teaching and ensure training is matched to individual need. The support from the two officers working closely with your school is making a difference because both understand their role. As a result, there are no mixed messages. Both officers are willing to roll-up their sleeves and help. Equally, they are not afraid to ask challenging questions to make you rethink your actions or to tackle any signs of progress faltering.

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