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Miss Caren Brooks
Headteacher
Bowhill Primary School
Buddle Lane
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Devon
EX4 1JT

Dear Miss Brooks

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bowhill Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 2 February 2015, 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 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:

- increase opportunities for staff to work with other schools to observe best practice
- ensure a systematic approach from senior leaders and external advisors to providing feedback that will develop teaching and ensure pupils of different abilities make faster progress
- ensure that teachers establish the subject areas in mathematics that pupils find harder to understand and adapt their teaching to improve progress in these areas.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plans were evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including notes of pupil progress meetings, the latest information about pupils' progress, and feedback to teachers following monitoring activities. During this visit, the deputy headteacher with responsibility for mathematics joined me on visits to classes in Key Stage 1 and 2. Together with the deputy headteacher, we looked at pupils' literacy and numeracy books.

Context

Three new governors have joined the governing body since the inspection, although there is still one vacant position. A member of staff is on an extended leave of absence, covered by increasing the hours of an internal appointment.

Main findings

The school's action plans address the key priorities and clearly set out the intended goals. The plans include a comprehensive range of actions that provide a detailed response to the weaknesses identified in the most recent s5 inspection. However, the plans describe several actions that are established features in many schools and there is much for senior leaders to do to catch up. The governing body has compiled a separate action plan that represents a positive response to the findings of a recent review of governance. In addition, subject leaders have produced action plans aimed at strengthening leadership that describe increased monitoring. The school has started to refine the plans and prioritise those activities that are directly linked to raising pupils' achievement. For instance, a group of governors are already evaluating key actions in terms of their impact on pupils' achievement rather than attempting to monitor all of the school's planned actions.

Senior leaders are developing a system so that pupils not making expected progress are identified quickly. This involves staff recording assessments of pupils' achievement every half term. As a result, staff have a better understanding of the variations in pupils' progress. While this appears to be working well, teachers have not yet identified the curriculum areas in mathematics that pupils find harder to understand and where achievement stalls. Staff and key senior leaders meet to agree actions that teachers will take to improve the progress of pupils in danger of falling behind. Although this is a positive development across the school, this is too recent to show significant impact on achievement.

Senior leaders are more frequently checking the quality of teaching and pupils' work across the school. Increased monitoring through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work has helped to provide a clearer picture of the strengths and weaknesses

of teaching. This has triggered additional support for individual teachers. For example, senior leaders are helping some teachers to plan different activities for different groups of pupils. Staff have had opportunities to observe each other and share planning. As yet, staff have had limited opportunities to work alongside teachers from other schools and observe best practice.

Recent changes to the way mathematics is taught are helping pupils to accelerate their understanding and development of mathematical skills. New mathematical resources are providing pupils with opportunities to use practical apparatus to support their learning. In a Year 1 and 2 class, pupils developed their early multiplication skills making good use of a range of resources to explore number facts. In a Year 6 class, more able pupils were provided with 3 dimensional shapes that helped develop their conceptual understanding. Pupils successfully used the resources to calculate the volume of a cylinder for themselves. However, a scrutiny of pupils' work shows that these new approaches are not working effectively in all classes.

Pupils in Year 1 and 2 are now recording their writing in a single book. This helps staff to follow up on pupils' misconceptions and helps pupils to build their skills and improve their writing over time. Work in books also shows that pupils in Year 3 and 4 are frequently set activities aimed at developing their spelling, handwriting and grammar but have few opportunities to write at length and in different styles.

Governors have responded positively after the inspection and to the more recent external review of governance. Governors hold a better grasp of detail and are more closely monitoring the school's performance. A separate plan clearly sets out the actions that governors will take to improve their support and challenge. Governors are committed to developing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, some have already attended training events.

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 had identified the school's drop in achievement and provided additional support prior to the inspection. A new School Improvement Partner has worked with the school to develop the school's collection and use of assessment information and to start to unpick the progress of different groups of pupils. A local authority advisory teacher has provided support for the school's mathematics leader that has helped to develop the opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical skills.

The school is beginning to develop links with local teaching schools to provide additional training and support for staff. The local authority have reacted

appropriately to ensure that that there is a consistent and systematic approach to coaching and training from all external parties. They are clear that evaluations of all external support will be measured in relation to the gains made by pupils so that all achieve in line with their capabilities.

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield
Her Majesty's Inspector