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17 April 2015

Mrs Christine Adams
Headteacher
Banks Methodist School
Chapel Lane
Banks
Southport
Merseyside
PR9 8EY

Dear Mrs Adams

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Banks Methodist School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 16 April 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 second monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in March 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:

- deepen pupils' mathematical understanding and increase their confidence by providing a greater range of problem solving and investigative activities
- ensure that all staff have the necessary skills to manage the behaviour of pupils effectively.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, two teachers and two teaching assistants. I also met four members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority. I spoke to a small group of pupils to gather their views about the school's progress. I evaluated your school improvement plan and took

account of your most recent data on pupils' achievement. I looked at minutes of meetings of the governing body's Standards and Effectiveness Committee. I also looked at records of your checks on teaching. We visited each classroom to talk to pupils and observe teaching. I also spent time looking at a range of books from each class.

Context

Since the last monitoring inspection in July 2014 one teacher has resigned and two new teachers have been appointed to permanent positions. A new parent governor has also joined the governing body.

Main findings

The whole school community shares your high level of expectation about what pupils can achieve. Everyone is working towards the same goal, which is communicated through a clear and purposeful action plan. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics and English shows signs of improvement in the academic year to date. Nonetheless, you are aware that there is still work to be done to ensure that the gaps in knowledge and understanding, resulting from historically weak teaching, continue to be plugged to ensure that all pupils reach the standards they are capable of.

You are steering the school through the significant changes that are required to bring about sustained improvement. You have decisively tackled the issue of inadequate teaching in both classes and two new teachers were appointed in September. As a result the poor pupil progress seen in both classes during the last monitoring visit in July 2014 has been eradicated.

Both newly appointed teachers share your passion and commitment to bring about positive change within the school. The collaborative approach you have adopted towards subject leadership is helping to develop their skills. They are now keen to further enhance their roles and share the responsibility to drive forward improvements.

Governors have taken purposeful action, with the support of the local authority, to develop their knowledge and skills. They have made the most of a range of training opportunities and are beginning to challenge you more robustly about the quality of teaching and how well pupils are achieving. They give of their time generously, the Vice-Chair's weekly visits to the school, as well as regular visits by other governors, mean that they are now able to find out for themselves what impact your changes are having. Governors have also introduced a more sharply focussed committee structure that is helping them to fulfil their role in checking on your progress towards improving the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils.

Teaching assistants are now clear about your expectations of their roles and responsibilities in helping pupils to learn. Teachers share and discuss their lesson plans with them so that everyone understands their individual role within the classroom. You have involved teaching assistants in recent pupil progress meetings and as a consequence they are now held more firmly to account. Training on assessment and questioning, as well as visits to other schools has helped teaching assistants to develop their skills. However, they are not yet fully confident in dealing with behavioural difficulties, particularly when they are covering the class during teachers' planning and assessment time.

The changes that you have implemented in mathematics are bearing fruit. In the lesson that we observed in Class 1, children were engaged in investigative activities that enthused and challenged them appropriately. Your own data show that most pupils are now making more than expected progress and this was evident in the sample of books that I looked at. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their skills through investigations and problem solving activities are not fully developed, hampering even more rapid improvements for some pupils.

Your insistence that pupils are provided with opportunities to write every day is helping to ensure that the quality of writing is improving. You are aware that there is more work to do however, as despite the improvements, some pupils are not yet working at the level they are capable of, particularly the most able in Key Stage 2.

Evidence gathered during my visit confirms your view that the introduction of a new behaviour policy in September is helping to ensure that behaviour in classrooms is improved. During our learning walk I observed that the vast majority of pupils were calm, engrossed in their learning and respectful towards one another and their teachers. Nonetheless, due to a lack of confidence and skills from some support staff some infrequent low level behavioural issues remain.

Pupils are categorical in their praise for the changes that you have brought about since September. They speak highly of their teachers who they say 'do not want them to do easy work'. They say that their books are now marked all of the time and the comments and questions that their teachers provide are helping them to understand what they need to do to improve. Pupils in Class 2 talk with enthusiasm about using their 'polishing pens' to revisit work, correct mistakes and enhance their writing. Pupils are also appreciative of the changes in their classrooms; comments such as 'the learning ladder in my classroom helps me to reach for the stars' are typical.

Ofsted may carry out further monitoring inspections and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority has maintained and built upon the increased support that was identified as positively impacting on school improvement during the last monitoring visit. Training provided for the governing body has helped governors define and understand their role more clearly; strengthening their ability to provide you with suitable challenge.

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

Yours sincerely

Martin Bell

Her Majesty's Inspector