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3 November 2015

Mrs Sue Butcher
Headteacher
Beenham Primary School
Mount Pleasant
Beenham
Reading
Berkshire
RG7 5NN

Dear Mrs Butcher

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Beenham Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 16 October 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 June 2015. 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 in order to become a good school.

Evidence

During the inspection, I met with you, an assistant headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor. I also met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I visited classrooms, spoke to pupils, scrutinised work in pupils' books alongside school leaders and evaluated the school improvement plan.

Context

Since the last inspection, two permanent teaching staff have joined the school. One temporary member of staff left the school in September and you are currently teaching their class. A new Chair of the Governing Body has been appointed.

Main findings

You have taken appropriate action to address the areas for improvement identified at your last inspection, wasting no time in tackling areas of weakness. You have strengthened your communication with parents and it is now more regular and transparent. You have addressed parental concerns about pupils' behaviour quickly through a prompt review of the school's behaviour policy. You have successfully recruited and retained two new members of staff. This has strengthened the quality of teaching and learning for pupils in Years 1 to 4. You have ensured that leaders and teachers make thorough checks to identify any gaps in pupils' learning. As a result, teaching is sharply focused on helping pupils to catch up quickly.

The new Chair of the Governing Body has led rapid improvements to strengthen the school's communication with parents. Parents now have a range of ways to share their views, including open 'surgeries', a parent forum and a weekly coffee morning. Parents made use of these opportunities recently, for example, to contribute to a successful review of the behaviour policy. Governors talk knowledgeably about current pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This is because they now regularly check these aspects of the school's work. Governors rightly reviewed their approach to the recruitment and retention of staff as a result of local authority training. Two successful permanent appointments of staff were made as a result. New staff report that they have received strong support from governors and leaders, and have made a confident start to their teaching.

Teaching in Years 1 to 4 is now stronger. Despite recent changes in staffing, Years 1 and 2 classrooms are orderly and productive. Teachers across the school make regular checks on pupils' progress in key skills and use these assessments effectively to shape their teaching.

Pupils' work shows they are making rapid progress, particularly in writing. Pupils show greater stamina and produce extended pieces of writing more regularly than in the past. This is because they have a better grasp of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and spelling. Pupils in Year 1 are developing their reading skills, building on their knowledge of phonics from the early years appropriately. In mathematics, although pupils have opportunities to apply their number work in solving problems, these tasks do not yet fully encourage pupils to reason mathematically or notice patterns. While leaders have set appropriate targets for most year groups, these are not ambitious enough for Year 3 pupils.

Changes are currently being made to the leadership structure to improve the definition of roles, with specific responsibilities for school improvement. It remains the case that the timelines in the school improvement plan focus heavily on the autumn term. While this has ensured good initial momentum, it is not clear enough how leaders will check improvements over a longer period of time.

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

School leaders have drawn on an appropriate range of local authority support to address areas for improvement. Leaders attended training to support the teaching of phonics and spelling, and to develop their use of assessment within the new curriculum. The training has equipped leaders to plan for improvements in these areas over the next term. The local authority has appropriate plans in place to check the progress the school is making over the next few terms.

This letter will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for West Berkshire.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Wilkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector