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Rosalind Welch
Bulmer St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School
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Dear Mrs Welch

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bulmer St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 24 January 2017, 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 May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. At its section 5 inspection before the one that took place in May 2016, the school was also judged to require improvement.

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.

The school should take further action to:

- identify and learn from good practice in other schools
- ensure that teaching in all age groups enables all pupils to make rapid progress to compensate for previous weak progress.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, pupils, the

governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. Together, we visited each classroom to see pupils learning and I checked the school's single central record to check that safeguarding requirements were met.

Context

Since the previous inspection, the school has been led by an interim headteacher. The school's federation with a neighbouring school is imminent, with the headteacher of that school becoming the executive headteacher.

Main findings

You arrived at the school shortly before the previous inspection and realised there was a lot to do. You quickly identified the school's strengths and weaknesses, but had little time to bring about improvements before the inspection. You also had little time to have an impact on raising standards before the summer 2016 tests for Year 6 and the Year 1 phonics check. Year 6 pupils did better than you anticipated, but you and governors recognise that pupils' progress was not good enough. Pupils' progress from the end of key stage 1 to the end of key stage 2 was below the national average in English, while their progress in mathematics was broadly average. The progress of disadvantaged pupils was broadly in line with other pupils with similar starting points nationally. These comparisons with the national average need to be treated cautiously because the number of pupils was so small. A real concern was that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard in the Year 1 reading test has fallen for the last three years.

You bring valuable experience of school improvement and have used this to create an improvement plan that is clearly focused on moving the school to 'good'. As interim headteacher, you give the school more time than you are contracted to do. You, governors and the local authority recognise that the current structure of the school cannot offer sufficient capacity to complete the journey to becoming 'good' without additional help. You are therefore leading the school into a federation with a neighbouring successful school.

The area for improvement from the previous inspection report regarding the early years foundation stage is being tackled well. The outdoor area has become a purposeful learning area that is kept up to date to reflect the changing seasons. The new teacher for early years and Years 1 and 2 is developing strong expertise in phonics teaching. As a result, younger pupils are developing much better reading and writing skills. You anticipate the test results this summer will reflect this and that the decline will be reversed. Older pupils have missed out on some basic skills development, such as the use of phonics. You are identifying gaps in pupils' learning. The early years leader is training teachers of older pupils how to teach phonics in order to plug those gaps.

Most of what you have done has rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers have been on training courses and there has been external advice given in school. This has opened their eyes to good practice and is raising their expectations of what pupils can achieve. This is beginning to have a positive impact, but the effectiveness of training is not uniform. You have introduced 'non-negotiable' expectations for lessons. You have created a firmer structure for the school day, ensuring better use of learning time. You have ensured that marking is more effective. Pupils in all classes were able to show me examples of how teachers' marking helped them to improve. This was more effective in some classes than others.

You have retained an interesting and stimulating curriculum. Governors spoke enthusiastically about links with schools in Uganda and New Zealand and pupils' involvement in archaeology. Teachers are beginning to take responsibility for promoting and checking the quality of provision across the school for subjects such as French and music.

Governors describe you as 'relentless' in knowing what needs to be done and ensuring that it happens. Governors visit classrooms and monitor books before their meetings. They can give concrete examples of improved standards.

You hold regular meetings with teachers to hold them accountable for the progress of individual pupils, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. You were able to talk confidently about the progress of individual pupils. You measure the impact of interventions. Performance management of teachers is now much more rigorous.

You have been largely successful in changing the culture from one where pupils were happy, to one where pupils are happy and learning. However, you recognise that, due to a lack of good progress in the past, there is still much to do to accelerate pupils' progress to where they should be by the end of Year 6.

External support

The local authority has provided support through bringing you and the school together. An improvement board comprising you, governors and a representative of the local authority meets to monitor and challenge the school's improvement. A representative of the local authority and of the Diocese visit regularly to monitor the school's improvements. Structural changes leading to federation have been enabled.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chelmsford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Essex. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector