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16 November 2012

Mr M Tonge
Bowness Primary School
Church Street
Little Lever
Bolton
BL3 1BT

Dear Mr Tonge

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit to Bowness Primary School on 16 November 2012

Following my visit to your school on 16 November 2012, 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 September 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a group of Year 6 pupils. The school improvement plan was evaluated; records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, records of reviewed pupil progress meetings and minutes of the Governing Body meetings were scrutinised.

Context

The staff profile remains the same as at the time of the inspection. Similarly, the school continues to be led by an executive headteacher from a local partner school and an acting headteacher. The local authority has appointed a new school improvement partner. Two members of the governing body have left; one new member has been appointed and arrangements to fill the final vacancy are in hand.

Main findings

Senior leaders, governors and staff have responded very positively to the judgement of the section 5 inspection and show determination and ambition to improve performance quickly to make the school good. Together with the local authority and key staff from the partner school, they have updated the school improvement plan to include the recommendations from the inspection report and secure sustained improvement. Although monitoring and evaluation action is implied in the plan, these processes could be made more obvious so that leaders and governors can plot progress more clearly. Monitoring of the quality of teaching has strengthened with the additional focus on developing teachers' self-evaluation of their practice. Increased pupil progress meetings have led staff to focus more sharply on the progress of groups of pupils rather than as a whole year group. Performance management arrangements now link tightly to improving the progress of the different groups, including the higher ability pupils.

Members of the governing body have received training in their role which has increased their confidence in checking on the performance of the school. An array of further training is planned, including that associated with the use of pupil progress information. Governor committees have been re-structured to share responsibility and accountability among the governor team; and a process has been introduced to enable governors to check and assess action taken by senior leaders. The Chair of the Governing Body accompanied senior leaders in observing lessons and the resulting feedback given to teacher. He feels better informed about the link between teaching and achievement, which he has shared with other governors. Governors appreciate the information presented by senior leaders but there is an opportunity for governors to ask senior leaders more searching questions about planned action.

Senior leaders and governors have begun to take effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, HMI recommend that further action is taken to:

- make absolutely clear who will monitor and evaluate planned action so that all involved know exactly what is expected of them and the leaders and governors can plot the progress of the school
- use the Ofsted document 'Good governance' and planned training to develop appropriate strategies for governors to hold senior leaders to account.

It would be helpful for the school to attend an Ofsted improvement seminar.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The new local authority officer has swiftly secured a positive working relationship with senior leaders and governors. The support and challenge from the partner school, which is led by a national leader of education, maintains the momentum for improvement. Joint activities between the staff from both schools has led to a mutually beneficial arrangement and increased confidence in the staff from Bowness.

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

Yours sincerely

Eileen Mulgrew
Her Majesty's Inspector