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10 May 2013

Paul Madsen
Headteacher
Thomas Bullock Primary School
Pound Green
Shipdham
Thetford
IP25 7LF

Dear Mr Madsen

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Thomas Bullock Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 9 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, the vice chair and a lead officer from the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's improvement plan were evaluated.

Context

A Year 6 teacher left in April 2013 and a supply teacher has been appointed, on a temporary one-term contract, to teach the Year 6 class until the end of the summer term 2013. A replacement teacher has been appointed to fill the vacancy, as from September 2013. A new diocesan governor and a new teacher governor have recently been appointed. The governing body has appointed a new clerk.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

The local authority statement of action identifies the additional support the local authority will provide, or commission, to help the school address the main areas of weakness identified by the inspection in February 2013. An Improvement Board, whose members include the headteacher, Chair of the Governing Body, local authority and diocesan representatives, will hold senior leaders, governors and others to account for the progress made in rectifying the most important weaknesses identified in February 2013. It will also coordinate any external support provided and evaluate its impact. Parents and carers will receive termly updates, from the Improvement Board, on the school's progress towards any targets set. The actions taken by the local authority so far are appropriate ones to drive improvement.

A school improvement plan is in place and it is focused on improving the standards achieved, teaching, leadership and management, including governance. However, the proposed actions are not always relevant, clear or specific and some work is being done that is not of high priority. Senior leaders are attempting to do too much during the summer term 2013. The persons responsible for leading actions are not always made explicit and the timescale within which improvements are expected are often unclear, particularly beyond July 2013. While the outcomes to be achieved are specified, some objectives are too general. The school improvement plan does not make sufficiently clear by whom, when and how progress will be monitored and the costing of work is insufficiently detailed. Currently, senior leaders are working towards improving the key weaknesses; however, the targeting of work is not robust enough.

The previous inspection report indicated that an external review of governors should be undertaken. A review was carried out on 9 May 2013, by a representative of the National College for School Leadership. The review will identify what aspects of governance are working well and what must be improved. Governors aim to quickly act on any recommendations to improve their effectiveness. Two new governors have been appointed since February 2013 and a Trust governor vacancy has been temporarily filled by a local rector. Arrangements are in place to fill the one remaining parent governor vacancy, so that the governing body will have its full complement of governors by September 2013. Plans are in place for the local authority's Governor Services department to work and train governors so that they suitably fulfil their statutory duties and responsibilities, particularly holding the school to account for its outcomes.

All staff and others who come into contact with children have been appropriately vetted to confirm their suitability to work with children. The single central register of staff does not contain a comprehensive record of the various checks undertaken. For example, the date of checks and the person carrying them out is not always specified.

Following the monitoring inspection the following judgements were made:

The school's improvement plan is not fit for purpose

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Norfolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeknik
Additional Inspector