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20 May 2013

Mrs Val McKie
Headteacher
Barlow CofE Primary School
Millcross Lane
Barlow
Dronfield
S18 7TA

Dear Mrs McKie

Requires improvement monitoring inspection visit under section 8 of the Education act 2005 to Barlow CofE Primary School.

Following my visit to your school on 17 May 2013, 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 February 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with the headteacher, the headteacher from a local school, members of the Governing Body, and a representative from the local authority. The school improvement plan was evaluated. A range of documentation was reviewed, including assessment information.

Context

Since the previous inspection the headteacher has made the decision to retire for understandable personal reasons. The headteacher from a local school will be leading the school from September 2013 for one year while the governors make arrangements for the recruitment of a new headteacher. He will work in the school for two and a half days a week.

Main findings

Assessment information indicates that in the present Year 6, boys and girls have not only made the expected progress, but that the proportion exceeding it is favourable. Leaders understand that in order for the school to be good they must demonstrate that this faster progress is occurring consistently across the school.

The headteacher has taken advantage of training and advice for her teachers provided by the local authority and two high performing local schools. This is starting to improve the teaching where it is most required. For example, in improving the advice received by pupils when their books are marked.

The school improvement plan sensibly concentrates on the two recommendations for improvement given at the last inspection. The success criteria are not specific enough on the areas that most need improvement. For example, one criterion is that 100% of teaching is good by July 2013. This is unrealistic. Teaching in some years is already good, so the target is not challenging enough for them. In the classes where it requires improvement, the school is aware that teaching will not be good by July 2013 because more needs to be done to develop those teachers.

The governors have worked constructively with the local authority to secure stable leadership arrangements for next year. This is crucial for the school on its journey towards the next inspection. Governors are reacting to circumstances, such as the constraint of the budget, when they agree the other staffing arrangements. It would be timely for governors to work with the local authority to review the staffing structure.

Governors do not have a good enough understanding of how the school manages the performance of teachers and how this links to the priorities for school improvement.

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 some of the success criteria in the school improvement plan more specific so that the actions planned are sharply focused on the teaching and learning that needs to be improved before the next inspection
- review the staffing structure to ensure that it is in the best interests of the pupils
- invite the headteacher, the new headteacher, Chair of the Governing Body and local authority representative to attend an Ofsted 'Getting to good' seminar in June 2013

- arrange for HMI to return to the school during the autumn term 2013 to carry out lesson observations with the headteacher, concentrating on where it requires improvement and the progress of different groups
- arrange for HMI to join a governors meeting in the autumn term to offer practical advice on how governance can be strengthened.

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

External support

The school has really welcomed the training, help and advice from the local authority that is starting to improve teaching. Governors have benefitted from the support of the local authority advisor which is resulting in them having a greater understanding of the school improvement plan and the questions they need to ask the headteacher to check on progress. The links with local schools have been very helpful in raising teacher's expectations of teaching. The constructive steps taken by the local authority to secure the future leadership of the school have been critical.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow

Her Majesty's Inspector