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4 July 2013

Mrs S Milner
Headteacher
Lower Farm Primary School
Bakewell Close
Walsall
WS3 3QH

Dear Mrs Milner

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Lower Farm Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 4 July 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report 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 November 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, your deputy headteacher and phase leaders, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of the local teaching school to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan. I looked at minutes of the full governing body and those of its sub committees, the school's monitoring, teachers' planning, two anonymised teachers' appraisals, and the outcomes from lesson observations and staff training, pupils' progress data for reading, writing and mathematics across the school, pupil premium data, the school's data on attendance and punctuality, the new behaviour policy, pupils' work in literacy, and feedback from teachers. I observed two lessons and your feedback.

Context

Since the last inspection one newly qualified teacher and an assistant headteacher have left. A new deputy headteacher and a care, guidance and support manager have joined the staff. Three new governors have joined the governing body.

Main findings

Since the last inspection you have worked swiftly to address the key issues identified in the report. The strong link with the teaching school has been used effectively to provide all staff with training. Teachers have completed the Improving Teaching and the Outstanding Teaching courses. This training has improved teachers' planning and their questioning. Evidence of this was seen in the lessons observed. Teachers modelled writing to pupils which helped them understand how to structure their own writing. Pupils knew their targets and teachers' marking helped them to improve their work. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length in all subjects. You have an accurate view of teaching. Your feedback to teachers correctly identified their strengths and areas for development. Every pupil's reading age is assessed and regularly monitored and careful interventions are made through the reading recovery programme. The teaching of letters and sounds has improved because all teachers and teaching assistants are teaching in the same way. Pupils' understanding and progress in mathematics has been improved because of the introduction of a new mathematics scheme. There are clear expectations of teachers. All teachers have had training in assessing pupils' work to ensure assessments are accurate and teachers have the same view of what each National Curriculum level looks like.

Attendance has improved and persistent absences have reduced because attendance is monitored more effectively. Pupils' behaviour has improved because all staff understand and follow the new behaviour policy.

The school development plan has been rewritten to address the areas for development identified in the last inspection. There are clear targets for improvement but there are no milestones to allow you to check on progress more frequently. You have restructured the senior leadership team and it is more effective in monitoring teaching and learning.

The governing body is more effective in holding you to account. Its committees have governors with appropriate skills and their scrutiny of the work of the school is improving. Newly appointed link governors come into school regularly to look at learning, pupils' work and to talk to staff and pupils. Your information to the governors is more detailed and enables them to have a more accurate picture of pupils' progress. Governors have a better understanding of staff appraisal.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure there are regular milestones in your development plan.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

External support

The local authority provides appropriate support. The school adviser regularly monitors and challenges school leaders. The Early Years Foundation consultant has helped staff improve the outside teaching area. The good support from the teaching school has been used for staff training.

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

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector