

CfBT Inspection Services
Suite 22
West Lancs Investment Centre
Maple View
Skelmersdale
WN8 9TG

T 0300 123 1231

Text Phone: 0161 6188524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 01695 566933

Direct F 01695 729320

Direct email: ggleaden@cfbt.com



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Mrs Christina Regan
Headteacher
Baxenden St John's Church of England Primary School
Church Avenue
Baxenden
Accrington
Lancashire
BB5 2RQ

Dear Mrs Regan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Baxenden St John's Church of England Primary School, Lancashire

Following my visit to your school on 25 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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 January 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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

- Link the post-inspection action plan to information about pupils' progress, with measurable targets.
- Work with older pupils and teachers on levels of working noise appropriate to different kinds of group work.
- Meet pupils with their books, including in science, to better understand their gains in subject knowledge and the impact of school improvement actions.
- Governors to structure their school visits and self-evaluation, and check communications with parents are in a clear style.

Evidence

During the visit, I met you, subject leaders in English and mathematics and the deputy headteacher, three governors and two representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's post-inspection action plan, recent information about pupil progress and attendance, and feedback on Parent View. Jointly with the headteacher, I visited three classes, talked with children about their work and changes since inspection. We then sampled books from two older year groups in English and science.

Context

There are three temporary teachers in school at present. Arrangements are in place to fill posts by the end of the summer term. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors were new just before inspection. A further parent governor will soon take up post. Changes to governance and teaching since inspection continue steps that were in place last year.

Main findings

When you took up post the year before the inspection, you saw that children could achieve much more and that the school was at a standstill. Too little teaching was good; some was inadequate. You put in place higher expectations and more robust improvement strategies. Several teachers chose to leave the school. At present, there are four temporary teachers. Working with the local authority, you have put in place support and challenge for teachers, whether temporary or permanent.

Examples of this boost to ambitions are: six weekly assessments for each class with progress meetings with teachers about pupils' learning; coaching of teachers by the deputy and local authority consultants; improving reading by training all teaching assistants in phonics; promoting wider reading by sending books home daily with a reading diary for parents; entering 12 pupils this year for Level 6 mathematics.

Some changes are at an early stage. Nevertheless, I saw positive examples of the effects on pupils and their work. Pupils I talked to were enthusiastic about the higher level work they now do in English and mathematics. Children entitled to the pupil premium have improved their attendance. Your own work to build up a school choir is showing the community how well local children can achieve.

Work in English which we looked at showed marked improvement in handwriting, extended writing, and in writing for different purposes. The work we saw in science was not as good. Pupils started to use basic scientific method but were unable to sustain it. Some experiments were not well chosen. Misconceptions about flat and round shapes were not picked up. In subjects more widely, pupils have noticed that different groups now get attention from the teacher as well as the teaching assistants. However, some also said the classroom was now noisier, because of the volume of working talk.

Your action plan is clearly set out and strong on monitoring and evaluation. There is as good range of evidence to check progress including scrutiny of books and assessments. Actions are practical, such as coaching some teachers in skills they need. Responsibilities are clear because a lead person is named for each activity.

Looking at the details of the plan, however, outcomes are quite general. There are not enough measurable outcomes or baselines. It is not clear how progress of pupils and groups will improve. The school has separate 'milestones' which could be integrated into the action plan.

The external review of governance has been completed. Most actions are about completed activities that have already been started. Governors explained that since the inspection, they are better prepared for meetings. Papers come more than a week in advance. Most governors can also access data such as the 'dashboard' which compares the school's results to others' nationally, in summary form.

About 45 parents responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire on Ofsted's website. Responses were very positive about behaviour and safety but not about information or response to concerns. I asked governors, including parent and community governors about this. They feel that the raised ambitions can make time demands on parents, such as home-school diaries and reading. They suggested that governors could help by checking that newsletters and any communications with parents are short, free of jargon and in plain language.

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 has worked well with the school. Support and challenge have had a positive effect on eliminating inadequate teaching and building leadership capacity. Classroom observation and standards of pupils' work have been moderated by local authority advisers, so that leaders are confident about their judgements. Consultants have worked alongside teachers to improve use of resources in mathematics. The local authority identified an experienced headteacher to strengthen the governing body. The Diocese of Blackburn has supported the school to find experienced governors. The diocese and local authority ensured that the external review of governance was done swiftly, by February.

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

Yours sincerely

Barbara Comiskey
Her Majesty's Inspector