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Mr Mike Tonge
Executive Headteacher
Bowness Primary School
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Bolton
Lancashire
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Dear Mr Tonge

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bowness Primary School, Bolton

Following my visit to your school on 2 June 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 February 2014. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

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 that the improvement plan addresses explicitly all the areas for improvement identified in the inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and the acting headteacher, a group of pupils, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school's improvement plan and scrutinised other documents provided by the school. I undertook a learning walk accompanied by the acting headteacher to observe learning across the school.

Context

In the six months since the section 5 inspection, the school roll has increased by about 10%. One teacher has started maternity leave and another teacher is now teaching her class. One teacher on a temporary contract has been made permanent.

Main findings

You and other school leaders agree that the areas for improvement identified at the inspection are appropriate ones to help move the school forward; several had already been identified by you prior to the inspection. The improvement plan provides useful points of focus and identifies what actions can contribute to improving provision and outcomes. Although the plan includes actions focusing on most of the areas for improvement, it does not have specific reference to improving pupils' skills in the mental recall of number facts.

Since the inspection, you have reviewed the curriculum to ensure that teachers give more prominence to the teaching of English and mathematics in all lessons. Links with a local teaching school have been strengthened to allow each teacher at Bowness to be part of a 'triad' of teachers with two from the teaching school. This process has enabled teachers to share good practice. It has contributed to improving the quality of teaching at Bowness so that it provides more consistent challenge to all groups of pupils and so enhances pupils' progress. A recent review by the local authority provided evidence of improvements in the quality of teaching, including in areas where teaching was previously identified as weaker. Teachers' growing skills in supporting international new arrivals have been externally recognised as an example for others to follow.

You and other leaders recognise that, owing to the very small number of pupils involved, this summer's Key Stage 2 test results will not in themselves provide strong evidence of better achievement. The school's records of better progress in other years are therefore particularly important.

Pupils are beginning to benefit from the additional time devoted to reading. Leaders have made an additional investment in books for the library although it is too soon for this to have had an impact. Similarly, more emphasis on writing at length is helping to improve the quality of pupils writing, particularly their powers of expression and the ambition in what they attempt to say.

Teachers are giving additional emphasis to pupils' recall of number facts. Pupils report growing confidence and appreciate the regular opportunities to reinforce their learning. Pupils are beginning to work more on multi-step problems in mathematics and to build their skills when faced with problems presented in different forms. Leaders need to ensure that all mathematics teaching retains an emphasis on developing pupils' understanding and sense of number.

Teachers' marking identifies where errors are made and provides corrections. Teachers' comments under the school's 'read and respond' policy provide useful indicators that show pupils how to improve their work. Pupils currently are not all in the habit of responding fully to comments. Teachers' marking of excellent work sometimes lacks an 'even better if' element to show how it could be improved further.

The school has evidence that more pupils than before are attending regularly. It continues to benefit from its close association with the local teaching school, not only in terms of supporting teaching but also in supporting leadership. The growing size of the school suggests a growing confidence in the school among local parents. While the need for external support is reducing at a senior level, continued support for middle leaders may be necessary for individuals at Bowness relatively new to the role.

Governors are fully involved in the management of the school. For example, the Chair of the Governing Body accompanied the acting headteacher in a recent learning walk to review the quality of teaching in the school. As a result, governors are fully informed about how teachers are addressing the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. Governors have attended additional training, including some provided in the teaching school.

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's school improvement professional has undertaken a review of teaching. While providing positive assessments on the quality of teaching seen, he stresses, appropriately, the need for the school to maintain high quality over time and to demonstrate consistently better achievement across the school. The support of the authority's inclusion service has contributed to developing teachers' strong skills in supporting pupils who are new arrivals in the country and who are at the early stages of learning English. The Chair of the Governing Body values the training provided by the local authority and the opportunity to meet with others in a similar role.

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

Yours sincerely

Paul Chambers

Her Majesty's Inspector