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Moira Foster-Brown
Headteacher
Birchfield Community School
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Dear Miss Foster-Brown

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Birchfield Community School

Following my visit to your school on 23 June 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 March 2015. 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:

- continue to implement its detailed plans to accelerate the progress of all pupils
- formalise, in writing, responsibilities for evaluating the success of actions contained in the school's post-Ofsted action plan, especially the role that governors will play in that process
- ensure that governors receive further support and training so that they understand key data about the school's performance, compared with national benchmarks, so that they can more effectively monitor the school's performance and challenge leaders.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher and other senior leaders, members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and a local leader of education who is providing support to the school to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I reviewed the school's self evaluation, post-Ofsted action plan and school development plan, pupil achievement records, anonymised teachers' performance management targets and minutes of governing body meetings. I also joined you and a deputy head on a tour of the school, briefly visiting many classrooms.

Context

Since March's section 5 inspection, there have been no changes in staff at the school. The governing body has been reconstituted and now comprises 11 members, reduced from its previous 17. External reviews of the school's use of pupil premium funding (additional government money to support pupils eligible for free school meals) and of governance are both scheduled to take place shortly.

Main findings

You have reacted with energy and enthusiasm to the issues raised in the inspection of March 2015. You, supported by your senior team, governors and the local authority have produced a post-Ofsted action plan that plainly, but in detail, addresses the key areas for improvement identified in the inspection report. The plan clearly sets out the actions that will be taken, who will lead them, timescales for completion and success criteria. Although the plan does include some detail about monitoring and evaluation, it would benefit from adding specific responsibilities and timescales for evaluating the success of actions included in the plan, especially the role that governors will play in that process.

Leaders know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses, and are committed to accelerating the progress that all pupils make. As a result, you have been very proactive in identifying areas where you need support and you have sourced suitable help. The local authority has helped you in this process and you now have a range of appropriate support in place.

Teaching is improving because your renewed emphasis on accelerating pupils' progress means that your monitoring of teaching and learning, through work scrutiny, lesson observations and learning walks is now more focussed on checking on the progress that pupils are making. You have sourced external moderation of pupils' work and teachers' planning and assessment, again with a clear focus on making sure that all teachers know that their pupils are making sufficient progress.

All pupils now have improvement targets in reading, writing and mathematics and they are well able to explain their targets when asked about them.

Because of your robust and speedy reaction to the inspection, you are already beginning to see some improvements because of your actions. The quality and presentation of work in pupils' books has improved because teachers are giving pupils more high-quality feedback through their marking. Poor attendance is a key issue that prevents some pupils from making enough progress. However, attendance has also begun to improve as a direct consequence of actions that you are taking to work with the parents of pupils whose attendance is poor.

Governors form a committed group of individuals who bring much expertise to the school. However, several governors are new to their role and need more support and training to understand fully the key data to which the school is held to account. As a result, although willing to ask questions of leaders, they are not currently in a position to challenge leaders as effectively as they should. You have planned for a review of governance to take place shortly as well as extra training for governors.

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

External support

The local authority has provided you with valuable support in writing your post-Ofsted action plan and improving attendance and a local leader of education has recently been commissioned by the local authority, through St Mary's Teaching Alliance, to provide support with developing teaching and learning.

You are also successfully identifying and accessing support from a range of other partners, because you are clear about what support is needed to secure further improvement. As a result, the school is not over-reliant on external help and improvements are likely to be sustainable.

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

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector