

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs R Tomlinson
Barrowford School
Rushton Street
Barrowford
Nelson
Lancashire
BB9 6EA

Dear Mrs Tomlinson

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of Barrowford School

Following my visit to your school on 1 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in July 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The local authority's statement of action and the school's development plans were evaluated.

Context

Since the previous inspection, one teacher has left the school and has been replaced. Another teacher is on maternity leave and a further teacher is on long-term sick leave. A temporary teacher has been appointed to cover one of these classes and an existing teacher is covering the other class. A member of staff has been promoted to the post of assistant headteacher with responsibility for the early years. Four governors have left the governing body and three new parent governors have recently been appointed.

The quality of leadership and management at the school

You, senior leaders, staff and governors have accepted the judgements made in the previous inspection. You are working rigorously and effectively in the areas for improvement outlined in your previous inspection, with the shared aim of becoming a good school.

Your work is starting to pay dividends already. In the early years, children are more engaged in their learning. You now know more clearly where their strengths and weaknesses lie, because your new systems to assess pupils' learning are more regular, thorough and accurate. This allows you to plan activities which are more closely matched to pupils' needs and abilities and enable them to make better use of resources in the setting. You and other senior leaders have embarked on a rigorous programme of monitoring to check on the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers are regularly informed where the quality of teaching is strong and where it can improve. There is a more consistent approach to teaching because staff are now adhering to agreed policies more closely, for example in the setting of homework and the marking of pupils' work. Your monitoring records show an improving picture in the quality of teaching and learning based on lesson observations, checks on work in pupils' books, checks on classroom learning areas and from assessment information. Your records indicate that inadequate teaching has been eradicated. We checked on the quality of learning in pupils' books in different year groups and discussed how the required improvements, for example in the amount of extended writing, were more embedded in some classes than in others. You are rightly focusing your monitoring and training efforts in the classes where further improvements are needed.

Governors' monitoring and evaluation of the school have strengthened. They have a clear overview of what needs to improve and are now more 'hands on' in their approach. For example, the Chair of the Governing Body discussed how governors are now linked with different leaders across the school so they can share the responsibility of checking on improvements. Notes of visits made by governors confirm this approach and show, in detail, how governors are checking on specific, agreed areas for improvement, such as pupils' engagement in their learning and the quality of displays in classrooms. Governors also receive weekly updates of leaders' checks on teaching and learning and of any meetings, visits, training or other activities which are supporting the journey of improvement.

We discussed your school development plans. At present, these plans are not fit for purpose. Development plans are detailed and thorough, because, as you rightly explained, you want all staff to understand clearly what is expected from them. Nevertheless, we discussed how plans need to be enhanced so that it is clear to everyone what the end goals are and how you can check your progress against these goals at different stages throughout the year. This will further enhance the ability for you, senior leaders and governors to reassure yourselves that you remain

on track to get to where you want to be, by the end of this academic year. We also discussed how you need to make clear in your plans how you prioritise the planned actions so that everyone knows what needs to be completed by when.

The local authority is monitoring your actions well and in the most important areas. It has completed an initial review and provided helpful information to you, outlining where you are progressing well and where improvements can still be made. This has helped you to remain focused on the key improvement areas. Timescales for the removal of serious weaknesses are challenging but realistic.

The local authority's statement of action, which was written in consultation with school leaders, is not fit for purpose because it lacks detail about the end goals for each improvement area. I have asked that you work together to clarify this aspect of your school development plans and the local authority's statement of action, so that they are both fit for purpose.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's improvement plans are not fit for purpose.

The local authority's statement of action is not fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hardman

Her Majesty's Inspector