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7 March 2017

Mr Andrew Ramsden
Headteacher
Barrow CofE Primary School
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Dear Mr Ramsden

Short inspection of Barrow CofE Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 16 February 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in December 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. During your time at the school, you have created an attractive and calm environment for pupils to enjoy. The artwork displayed throughout the school, such as Mayan masks and Andy Warhol-style self-portraits, creates colourful, bright classrooms that pupils appreciate. Pupils say that learning is fun because lessons frequently combine other aspects of the curriculum. Pupils like the size of the school because they 'know everyone'. One parent described the school as being at 'the heart of the village community'.

At your last inspection, you were asked to look at two areas for improvement. You now combine aspects of the curriculum so that pupils practise their English and mathematics skills in different contexts. The introduction of the new curriculum has revealed that further challenge is needed to enable the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils to reach the highest standards, and you have identified this as one of your school improvement priorities.

Since the last inspection, there have been many changes to the school. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher and the restructuring of the governing body have helped to drive school improvement. The recent decision to create a discrete early years class is starting to improve outcomes for children.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is well led and managed. You have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Vulnerable pupils are supported well by school staff, who have a very good knowledge of each pupil in their care. All staff are trained regularly on safeguarding matters and they are up to date with the latest legislation. You have created a culture in school where pupils feel safe and they believe that they can turn to any member of staff to share their concerns.

Inspection findings

- We agreed the inspection would focus on a number of key lines of enquiry. The first of these reviewed the challenge of the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils. The progress of pupils currently in the school is good. This is reflected in pupils' English and mathematics books. Pupils show strong progress when they are able to explain their thinking; for example, in one Year 3 and 4 lesson, pupils explained the concepts of evaporation, condensation and the changing state of molecules from gas to liquid. This level of challenge, however, is not evident in other classes. Not all teachers have adjusted to the levels required of the new curriculum and the work does not stretch these pupils' thinking. Although few girls achieved the highest standards in English and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and Year 6, there is little difference between the work of the most able girls and the most able boys. However, these pupils feel they can achieve more, and parents, while commending the school for the effective support that it provides to pupils, agreed that they would like to see more challenge in the work for their children.
- The second key line of enquiry reviewed the attendance of pupils who are in receipt of free school meals. You have made great efforts to reduce pupil absence and are successful in improving the attendance of this target group. Procedures, such as meetings with parents to explore the causes of absence, are making a difference in ensuring that barriers to good attendance are being removed. These actions are making parents aware that unnecessary absence from school is not acceptable.
- The monitoring of teaching was another focus for the inspection, including the response to a dip in the early years. You carry out checks on teaching which lead to areas for staff development. However, these improvements focus too much on classroom organisation rather than improving teaching skills. There is a lack of clarity for teachers about how to improve their practice or how to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Following a decline in standards in the early years, governors agreed to reorganise the provision. The appointment of a highly motivated and effective class teacher has ensured that children make at least typical progress. Children cooperate well in their learning, which is highly imaginative and creative. The children decided to draw a chalk café on the day of the inspection, and some children decided to write menus or cook different dishes for visitors. The result was a rich opportunity for them to practise their language skills. The class

teacher supported children's learning with notable effect by posing challenging questions and children were engrossed in their work.

- The monitoring carried out by you and the governors ensures that the school development plans are targeting the right priorities. Improvements are clear in your response to the dip in the early years. Your actions were prompt and effective. This is not always evident in the school development plan, with some actions lacking detail and not clarifying how success is to be measured. This lack of clarity means that governors cannot fully evaluate the school's effectiveness or accurately identify actions for future improvement.
- Behaviour in school is well managed. Although you have recently found the need to exercise the full range of sanctions, this has been necessary to maintain the high expectations of behaviour at the school. Many parents commented favourably on the school's approach to supporting those pupils who find managing their behaviour difficult.
- Governance is strong. Governors are supporting and challenging leaders to set higher aspirations for pupils' performance. The governing body has only recently restructured and appointed a new, effective chair of governors who is setting a new direction for the school. Although the impact of this is yet to be seen, governors are aware of the need to tighten their focus on the use of pupil premium funding to challenge the most able disadvantaged pupils to make stronger progress.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- more precise targets are set to help teachers to improve their teaching skills
- the school development plan includes more precise action and makes it clear how success will be measured
- teachers embed the new curriculum, ensuring that sufficient opportunities are given to reach the highest standards.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Chester, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Cheshire West and Chester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Bentham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

- I met with leaders and governors and spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- I visited all classes and spoke to pupils informally during lessons about their work.
- Safeguarding documentation, including the school's record of checks done on newly appointed staff, were viewed as part of the inspection.
- I discussed the school with pupils, both formally and informally, at lunchtime.
- Behaviour, bullying and attendance records were viewed.
- I scrutinised pupils' books in both English and mathematics.
- I reviewed documentation, which included the monitoring of teaching and learning, governors' minutes, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, and the school development plan.
- Twenty responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were analysed.