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3 July 2014

Ms Kelly Morgan
Headteacher
Woodbank Primary School
Brandlesholme Road
Bury
Lancashire
BL8 1AX

Dear Ms Morgan

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Woodbank Primary School, Bury

Following my visit to your school on 2 July 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 March 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:

- develop the roles and skills of subject leaders in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of improvement, in line with development of the new curriculum
- ensure good progress is made in reading in all groups across Key Stage 2
- develop the skills of staff in Key Stage 2 to develop pupils' extended writing in different subjects.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you and other members of the senior leadership team. I met with four members of the governing body including the Vice Chair and considered a detailed report prepared by the Chair of the Governing Body who was unable to attend. I also met with a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated and various documents were

scrutinised including your most recent report to the governing body, minutes of meetings and a report provided by the local authority school effectiveness partner. You accompanied me on a tour of the school, during which we made brief visits to all classes and talked informally with pupils about their work. I also considered a sample of pupils' exercise books.

Context

You took up your post as headteacher on 28 April 2014, replacing an interim headteacher who had been seconded by the local authority to lead the school following the resignation of the previous substantive post-holder. You are an experienced headteacher with a successful track record of securing improvement.

The Key Stage 2 leader has been absent due to illness since April 2014 and the Year 5 class has been taught by a supply teacher.

Main findings

You have made an immediate, highly positive impression on staff at the school, many of whom praised your combination of emotional intelligence and purposeful drive. Several told me that you had already made an 'amazing difference' to the culture of the school and that they are now very clear about the improvements that are needed and their role in securing Woodbank's transformation.

You have worked with urgency to develop an action plan in conjunction with your whole staff that includes clear actions and is focused on raising achievement for all. The plan covers the areas for improvement identified at the inspection but it is not sufficiently detailed regarding how subject leaders will be supported to lead development and undertake monitoring and evaluation in their subjects. Your tracking data indicates a need to focus on improving progress in reading in addition to those areas identified in the inspection report. Together with your senior leaders, you have given thought to how guided reading might be enhanced.

Your plan to restructure the school's staffing is currently the subject of consultation. The intention of your proposal is to provide leaders with clearly defined, manageable and complementary roles that will avoid duplication of effort and ensure consistent focus on core priorities. A period of turbulence in leadership unsettled staff and reduced their morale for a time. You are working to develop sustainable management systems that support school improvement. The perception among staff and governors is that you recognise and nurture individual talents and value the team spirit you have found at Woodbank.

In the short time since taking up post you have implemented some key changes that are already having an impact. The provision of further opportunities for pupils to produce extended writing in literacy lessons and through their topic work in the foundation subjects is being met with enthusiasm. A pupil in Year 1 proudly showed me the book on dinosaurs he was composing and explained that he would be using connectives. Key Stage 1 pupils had thoroughly enjoyed their recent trip Blackpool and produced recounts with plenty of detail about their day out. There is some variability across classes in developing purposeful writing but overall pupils are writing at greater length, more regularly and skilfully than was the case earlier this year.

You recognised that the school's system for tracking pupils' progress was not robust enough in recording the achievement of vulnerable groups and you have therefore invested in a system that is better suited to your needs. You and your senior leaders have a good understanding of pupils' achievement across year groups and are working hard to identify any achievement gaps and provide appropriate interventions to boost pupils' learning. Your work is having impact and there are encouraging signs of improved progress.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 indicates good progress from pupils' starting points. There is still work to be done to compensate for underachievement over time in Key Stage 2. You are very clear that the proportions of pupils exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics need to improve before the school can be considered good; staff share this awareness and are ambitious that the school can become outstanding because 'we are all pulling in the same direction now.'

Although pupils' behaviour was not identified as a concern during the section 5 inspection, you have reviewed and amended the behaviour policy to ensure that very good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are the norm. Pupils appreciate the new 'traffic light system.' Their commitment to the school is shown by their improved attendance. You are planning to make children's playground experience less crowded and more enjoyable by extending the range of equipment available at social times.

The good practice evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, characterised by vibrant teaching and close attention to detail in assessment is being extended through the school through the planning of a new curriculum. You are encouraging staff to find opportunities to build on pupils' interests while developing their academic capabilities. In Year 3 the World Cup 2014 has been used as a stimulus for cross-curricular learning. Pupils have enjoyed producing artefacts and writing, as well as completing mathematical investigations linked to the topic. The roles and skills of subject leaders in supporting the evolution of the curriculum are under-developed.

There is a buzz of energy and optimism about the school. Year 6 pupils have relished the opportunity of performing 'Pirates of the Curry Bean' to their families and friends, although their evening performances have not distracted them from their hard work in lessons.

The strength of the governing body was recognised during the school's recent section 5 inspection and has been further developed. Governors are now directly linked to different areas of the school's work and have good insight. They visit school regularly, have completed training and undertaken a skills audit to ensure that their talents are put to best use. They receive high quality information that equips them to pose challenging questions.

You have been proactive in asking and responding to parents' views. The Nursery is offering full time places from September 2014 in response to local need. Parents have been invited to contribute their ideas to the school improvement debate. This typifies an increasingly open and collaborative style of leadership that is also reflected in your publication to all staff of non-confidential meeting minutes and your inclusion of all staff on training and at meetings that touch on their work. Support staff now feel part of the school team and appreciate the clear guidance they now receive along with better recognition of their skills, interests and experience.

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 anticipated the outcome of the recent section 5 inspection. It categorised the school as under-performing, largely because of uncertainty surrounding leadership, and responded by providing additional resource. Appropriate support, proportionate to the school's needs, was provided before and since the inspection. The school effectiveness partner spent a considerable time working with the governing body to secure your appointment. In addition through his termly visits, he has approved your action plan and provided advice that you have found helpful. You have maintained a positive, supportive relationship with the interim headteacher who led the school for a short time immediately prior to your appointment and you have fostered a productive relationship with an outstanding primary school through a teaching development programme funded by the local authority which will include six Woodbank teachers by the time it is complete. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about the impact of observing practice in another school and analysing it with colleagues. A consultant, brokered by the local authority, is undertaking some developmental work with staff aimed at more consistent practice being developed in planning, teaching and assessment. In addition to local authority support, you have attended Ofsted's *Getting to Good* seminar.

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

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector