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25 November 2013

Mr Clive Richardson
Headteacher
Bishop Alexander Primary and Nursery School
Wolsey Road
Newark
NG24 2BQ

Dear Mr Richardson

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Bishop Alexander Primary and Nursery School

Following my visit to your school on 22 November 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the findings of my visit. 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 May 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement. The headteacher should take immediate action to:

- sharply focus the work of all staff on one priority for improving teaching at a time
- provide the drive to ensure that each priority is tackled quickly and effectively in order to improve pupils' achievement rapidly
- deploy senior and middle leaders to work with teachers so that improvements are firmly embedded in every class, thereby raising the quality of teaching to consistently good or better across the school
- ensure pupil premium funding is used to help the pupils for whom it provides support to close the gap on the standards attained by other pupils. (The pupil premium is additional government funding to support pupils eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those with parents in the armed forces)

- keep governors fully and immediately informed about any internal or external evaluations of teaching and achievement, so that they can properly carry out their responsibility for holding the school to account.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. You accompanied me as I carried out short observations of lessons, we spoke to pupils about their work and looked at their books. I evaluated the school improvement plan, information relating to pupils' achievement and reports from recent external monitoring of the school's work.

Context

The school is scheduled to close and re-open as an academy in February 2014.

Main findings

The pace of school improvement is very slow. The most recent unvalidated data for pupils' achievement indicates that standards of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics are exceptionally low. Pupils make progress at a significantly slower rate than is expected for them. The progress of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is very slow and they are not closing the gap on standards attained by other pupils, yet the school uses a large proportion of this funding to reduce class sizes for all pupils. The Governing Body has not been given the national data by the school, therefore they have been unable to ask the necessary questions as to why they are so weak.

During our joint visits to lessons we saw a large number of pupils working below the levels expected for their age, more-able pupils not being suitably challenged and most pupils not tackling their work enthusiastically. These findings are very similar to those from another external evaluation of the school, carried out recently. You do not provide a sufficient sense of urgency in tackling these weaknesses. You have not made clear what everybody should be doing to improve teaching and raise pupils' achievement. Your school improvement plan has not driven up standards since the last inspection because it has only just been completed and it does not include actions necessary to improve teaching. You do not provide sufficient guidance and direction for senior and middle leaders therefore they do not work in a concerted way to embed improvements in every class. As a result, any improvements introduced are patchy and short-lived.

There is an ethos of warm, friendly relationships in the school and you contribute significantly to this by knowing the children so well and frequently having an appropriate and encouraging comment for them. In a minority of lessons we saw pupils working really hard on their mathematics because they were given suitably interesting and challenging problems to solve. Most teachers and leaders work hard

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and are eager to do their best for the pupils. The Governing Body is very ambitious for the school to be a good one as soon as possible.

The monitoring inspection identifies serious concerns about aspects of the school's performance which will be reported to Ofsted and may lead to the next section 5 inspection being brought forward.

External support

The local authority has concerns about the school therefore they provide support and challenge above the level normally allocated for most schools in similar circumstances. Their advice and guidance is not always implemented by the school in a way that leads to sustained improvements in practice. They are working in effective partnership with the proposed academy sponsors to ensure continuity of support and challenge when the school becomes an academy in February 2014.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Nottinghamshire and as below.

Yours sincerely

John Rutherford
Her Majesty's Inspector