

18 November 2015

Mr Neil Ringrose
Balladen Community Primary School
Linden Lea
Rawtenstall
Rossendale
Lancashire
BB4 6DX

Dear Mr Ringrose

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Balladen Community Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 3 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the outcomes for pupils.

Evidence

During my visit, I met with you, school leaders and members of the teaching staff. I met four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body and chairs of the finance and the curriculum committees, and a representative from the local authority. You and I visited every classroom at least once and, together, we observed teachers and pupils in Key Stage 2 at work. We spoke with pupils to gather their views about their learning. Our visits concentrated on pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics in Key Stage 2.

I scrutinised the single central record and other documents relating to safeguarding and child protection arrangements, considered your improvement plans and evaluated your most recent information on pupils' outcomes including the unvalidated results attained by pupils in the 2015 tests.

Context

You have recently taken over as headteacher of Balladen, a smaller than average primary school. The previous acting headteacher is now your deputy headteacher. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils who speak English as an additional language is

lower than that found nationally. The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is similar to that found nationally. More pupils leave or join the school at different times of the year than found in other schools across the country. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is nearly twice the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.

Standards and progress in Key Stage 2

The monitoring inspection was in response to falling standards and weaker progress in reading and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014, and weaker progress in writing in 2015.

Standards and progress in reading and mathematics dipped considerably for Year 6 pupils in 2014 compared with those at the time of the last inspection in 2012. Decisive action has ensured that standards and progress have significantly improved in 2015 for reading and mathematics at Key Stage 2. The proportions of pupils achieving the levels of attainment expected for their age in 2015 were significantly above those seen nationally for mathematics and reading while the standards for writing were in line with those seen nationally. While some areas have advanced quickly in their development, the rate of progress pupils made across Key Stage 2 in writing declined in 2015, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and boys.

You know your new school well as a result of immersing yourself among staff and pupils in your first few weeks in post. You have made good use of the information provided by the high-quality review and monitoring systems in place in the school. The systems involve teachers and leaders at all levels and enable you and your senior leadership team to see what is working and what is not working across the school. You have planned appropriate actions to meet staff development needs. These actions will support and strengthen their practice.

Our visits to classrooms held no surprises for you. Teaching is strong and getting even better because of the shrewd actions taken by your deputy headteacher during her time as acting headteacher. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations. Teachers and teaching assistants use questions highly effectively to develop pupils' learning. Additional classroom support is well used and places help and challenge where it is most needed. Pupils are making much stronger progress because of the action you and your deputy have taken. Recent teacher assessment information confirms this halt and reversal of decline: a rise in the rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics is evident. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for extra support through pupil premium funding, who face a tougher journey to excel. Higher proportions of these pupils are on track to make both expected levels of progress and better than expected levels of progress across Key Stage 2 than found nationally. The quality of work seen in pupils' books demonstrates accelerated progress and confirms that concerted action from your leadership team is leading to strong improvement.

In 2014, leaders identified reading as a concern due to a dip in standards and weaker progress made by pupils in the subject across Key Stage 2. Swift action by the acting headteacher resulted in rapidly improving standards. Resources were targeted accurately and the governing body prioritised funding to improve the school's library, reviving and raising an interest and a love of reading among pupils. In particular, boys' love of reading is flourishing because leaders have ensured that plenty of 'boy-friendly' books are available to tempt the most reluctant of readers. The employment of an additional teaching assistant to develop and run the library, alongside a popular reading club, has emphasised the importance of reading and extended pupils' opportunities to improve their reading skills and levels of enjoyment. You have made changes to the curriculum to strengthen the teaching of reading: for example, the daily reading session has strengthened pupils' reading skills. The requirement for teachers to develop stimulating and interesting classroom reading areas, coupled with more frequent visits to the library, has provided pupils with 'open access' to a wider range of books on current topics. Leaders are now devoted to monitoring reading and holding teachers to account for continued improvements in reading standards.

In 2014, there was underperformance in mathematics at Key Stage 2. Too few pupils made the progress expected of them and standards were lower than those seen nationally. Leaders took immediate action and secured rapid improvements, on which you are continuing to build. Now, teachers provide targeted support sessions on common misconceptions and identify skills to improve pupils' confidence in mathematics. The most able receive additional support and challenge. This allows them to extend and deepen their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts. Consequently, more pupils are reaching the highest standard. You recognise the need to provide additional mathematics training for all staff and you have made better use of mathematics experts and teaching assistants in school to help pupils learn. The clever use of a male teaching assistant, a 'sporting role model', is further inspiring boys to persevere in developing their mathematical skills and confidence. One particular focus for mathematics continues to be the improvement of pupils' mental recall of multiplication tables. Pupils are set regular homework to help them develop this skill. Successful pupils receive certificates during Friday assemblies. Consequently, pupils are keen to practise their 'times tables' and are more confident in using them in class.

The subject leader checks that actions continue to have the desired impact through regular scrutiny of work and increased monitoring of the teaching of mathematics. The regular progress meetings and assessment reviews, with senior leaders, hold teachers to account.

The unvalidated results for 2015 indicate that the progress made in writing in Key Stage 2 declined, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Your prompt actions to address this issue build on previous plans and are already bearing fruit. Your most recent teacher assessments and the work seen in pupils' books show that rates of progress are accelerating rapidly. Disadvantaged pupils are quickly closing the gap

with other pupils in school and with other pupils nationally. Boys' progress is improving but further work is needed to ensure that more boys succeed and make the best progress possible to reach the highest standards.

A review of the curriculum has ensured the inclusion of topics, such as those focused on sport or the Second World War and remembrance. These are stimulating and interesting, particularly to boys. Teachers teach the skills of writing systematically and use links between subjects well to improve writing and reading skills. For example, in Year 5, pupils developed report-writing skills through the creation of newspaper articles based on historical research about the Second World War. In Year 6, pupils extended their vocabulary through the exploration of similes and metaphors linked to Halloween celebrations and spooky stories in class reading books.

The school minibus is used more, now, to enable pupils to access experiences and educational visits that broaden their knowledge of the wider world. Visits to school by authors and poets provide inspiration and bring words and books to life. These activities, coupled with others planned for the future, make best use of the school's grounds. There are equal opportunities for pupils to expand their experiences on which they base their own writing. The use of technology is beginning to have a direct impact on pupils' writing: for example, pupils can begin working together collaboratively and learn from each other. Your plans to make the best use of the excellent practice in school and allow teachers to observe each other are well founded. The additional training for teaching assistants is supporting the teaching of writing in all classrooms.

You, and your leadership team, closely monitor the impact of actions and report them to the governing body which holds you to account. To ensure that assessments are accurate, you draw upon the support of the local authority. You are keen to establish closer working relationships with other schools to moderate your pupils' standards. As a result, you are confident in the accuracy of the assessments that teachers make regarding writing, reading and mathematics.

Governors are supportive of the school but also recognise their role in holding leaders to account. The governing body uses the skills of its members well: governors with an education background are on the curriculum committee; they challenge leaders, regularly, to ensure that any funding for projects is having the desired effect. Other governors forensically analyse budgets to ensure that leaders can sustain the high levels of support in classrooms. Governors have a good understanding of the use of the pupil premium and its impact because of the detailed reporting by school leaders. Governors also check what they are told through regular conversations with pupils and staff and visits to school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements. Staff and governors receive suitable safeguarding training.

External support

The school makes good use of its links with the local authority to commission appropriate levels of support from officers to ensure that you, as headteacher, are held to account through your performance management. They have confirmed through moderation meetings that assessments by teachers in the school are accurate.

As you are a new headteacher in your first headship, the local authority has rightly provided appropriate additional support for you. It has brokered the support of a local headteacher to act as your mentor and ensured that you are given access to all relevant training to enable you to have an immediate, positive impact.

Priorities for further improvement

- Continue to have the highest expectations of all pupils so that your actions to improve the rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics, particularly for boys, allow them to make the best possible progress.

I am copying this letter to the Director of Children's Services for Lancashire, to the Secretary of State for Education and the Chair of the Governing Body. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector