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23 May 2013

Ms Sue Widgery
Headteacher
East Oxford Primary School
Union Street
Oxford
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Dear Ms Widgery

Requires improvement: monitoring visit to East Oxford Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 23 May 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report on 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit I met with you, a representative of the local authority, two governors, the senior leadership team, the English subject leader and the special needs coordinator. I also spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body by telephone. I evaluated the school improvement plan and we walked around some classes, looking at work in pupils' books and talking to pupils about their work.

Context

There have been no significant changes to the school since the last inspection. The headteacher is retiring at the end of this academic year and the governing body are at an advanced stage in securing interim arrangements for headship, until a permanent arrangement is made.

Main findings

Your plan clearly sets out where you want to be by the end of the next academic year. I was pleased to hear from teachers about a culture shift in the school so that adults have higher expectations of academic achievement for all pupils. Your senior leaders regularly meet with individual teachers to talk about the progress different pupils are making. These meetings are used to coach staff, identify additional support for pupils and to identify areas for additional training. I think it is sensible that these meetings take place six times a year because it means that teachers are having the opportunity to regularly talk about how progress is increasing for those pupils who have fallen behind.

I was encouraged to see some good quality writing in Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2. This has needed to be an area of focus because attainment in writing has not been high enough. Pupils enjoyed writing and talked eagerly about their work. Teachers are using learning objectives and success criteria to show pupils what they are learning about. It was encouraging in some classes to see teachers referring to these when discussing pupils' work. Marking in books has improved. Teachers are marking work based on the learning for that day. You have insisted on all teachers following your new marking policy robustly, but now they are doing this, it is time for them to think about why they are marking. At times pupils are making the same repeated mistakes in their work and these are not being identified by teachers. It is important that teachers use their own professional judgement to identify small errors and areas to improve for each child. Marking is to help pupils to move forward. Teachers need to make sure they are not missing the obvious points because they are too focused on commenting solely on the learning objective.

You know that the phonics screening check last year showed that the teaching of phonics was weak. You have introduced a highly structured programme to teach pupils to read and spell using the sounds that letters make. This programme has been brokered and funded by the city council. I was pleased to see that this is monitored by specialist consultants and I was encouraged to see that their feedback to teachers was regular and expected technical accuracy. It is important that teachers take this feedback on board so they continue to improve. I expect your phonics screening check to be much more positive this year. Pupils enjoyed the sessions that we observed and joined in enthusiastically.

The quality of teaching in Year 1 has improved. We saw some very focused writing sessions. Children enjoyed showing off their work and engaged well in the lessons. This is really sensible and I am pleased to see that there is much more adult lead learning in Year 1.

Middle leaders are given more time out of the classroom and this gives them the opportunity to monitor the quality of teaching in lessons. They told me that you have conducted joint lesson observations and this is a good idea to make sure they are making accurate judgements and giving helpful feedback and support. Your

governors are focused on helping the school improve. They have focused their monitoring on the four priorities identified in your school improvement plan. I know that they have spent a lot of time thinking carefully about the plans for leadership next year. Their plans make sense but I am anxious to ensure that the transition is smooth so the new leadership team can hit the ground running. I will monitor this transition carefully and I have asked your Chair of the Governing Body to keep me informed of any developments.

The school has been supported by a National Leader in Education (NLE) for the past year. This support has included joint training, opportunities to observe teachers in other schools and support for middle leaders. This year the NLE became the local authority's consultant responsible for monitoring improvements and brokering support for this school. He is in a strong position to ensure the improvements made over the past year are embedded appropriately and built upon.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. Following the visit to the school, I recommend that further action is taken to:

- ensure teachers use their professional understanding of what pupils need to learn when feeding back to individuals on their next steps
- ensure the new leadership team is able to hit the ground running in September so the pace of development continues to accelerate.

Ofsted will continue to monitor the school until its next section 5 inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan
Her Majesty's Inspector