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27 June 2013

Ms Helen Thomas
Headteacher
Alma Primary School
Alma Road
Enfield
EN3 4UQ

Dear Ms Thomas

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Alma Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 27 June 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 March 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I held meetings with you, other senior leaders, middle leaders, the Chair and other members of the Governing Body, representatives of the local authority and an external consultant to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. I also carried out a tour of the school with you. The school's action plans and other documents were evaluated.

Context

There have been some changes to staffing since the inspection. A new standards leader for Years 5 and 6 took up post in March. A newly qualified teacher was recruited and started his probation year in May. Three newly qualified teachers will join the school in September as well as a graduate teacher trainee. A standards leader and two part time teachers are leaving the school at the end of this term. A deputy head teacher has still to be appointed to fill the existing vacancy which is currently covered by an acting deputy.

Main findings

The school action plan shows a clear understanding of what improvements are needed. It is detailed and specific which has allowed you to regularly review and evaluate the progress you are making. The role of the governing body is clear, although monitoring and support from the local authority still needs to be identified. You regularly check that your own judgements are accurate by asking other professionals to check what impact your work is having. You have set clear targets and are making steady progress towards them.

Significant improvements in your systems for analysing information have resulted in all staff being aware of how individuals and groups of pupils are performing. Middle leaders now ensure that teachers are using this information to teach lessons that take account of every pupil's needs. This has resulted in improved rates of progress. When progress is less than good, it is recognised quickly, allowing further interventions to be made. Training for middle leaders and classroom teachers has ensured that assessments of pupils' work and the amount of progress they make are now measured accurately.

Standards in mathematics are still below average across all year groups. You have not been successful in your attempt to recruit a senior leader with a responsibility for raising standards in mathematics. You have correctly identified that this remains a priority and will endeavour to appoint a high quality candidate to the post next term. In the meantime, the local authority has arranged for support from two consultants in mathematics to continue.

Accurate tracking has identified that Year 4 is still underachieving. You are addressing this with further interventions such as the creation of an additional class for this year group. This will create smaller class sizes and allow closer monitoring and support for pupils who are falling behind.

Professional training opportunities have been carefully planned. They link closely to the needs of individuals and the action plan for the school. They have included training in how to improve the teaching of reading and mathematics across the school. Teachers and middle managers say they are more effective because they now recognise what needs to be done and have a better understanding of how to do it. You are increasingly holding teachers to account for improving rates of pupil progress. You monitor this closely through meetings, assessment information and observations of teaching.

Governors are now better informed about how much progress pupils are making. Changes to the membership of the governing body have created a need for additional training. Although support from a Local Leader in Governance has been helpful this year, further changes to roles and responsibilities still need to be agreed.

An external review of governance should be carried out as soon as possible to identify any necessary improvements.

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:

- recruit a senior leader to take responsibility for improving the standard of mathematics across the school to allow all pupils to make better progress
- arrange an external review of governance so that members of the governing body are able to provide improved levels of support and challenge to school leaders to raise standards across the school.

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

You are receiving effective support from the local authority. It has arranged for a consultant to work with school leaders to monitor the implementation of the action plan. He has helped you to interpret data and ensure that this supports good teaching in the classroom. Training for teachers to improve the quality of mathematics teaching and ensure that assessments are accurate has been provided by mathematics consultants. Visits and links with other schools have been arranged to improve your awareness of what good teaching looks like. A recent review carried out by the school improvement partner has helped to validate the school's self-evaluation and action plan. Support from the local authority will stay in place until you are re-inspected.

You have also employed an external consultant for two days a week to support middle leaders. She has provided coaching in how to observe teaching and give high quality feedback to classroom teachers. This is starting to raise standards of teaching across the school although you recognise that inconsistencies still remain.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector