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1 July 2013

Mr Daniel Eaton
Headteacher
Leigh Primary School
The Green
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Dear Mr Eaton

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Leigh Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 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 January 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, three senior governors, the deputy headteacher, staff members and a representative of the local authority. I toured the school at work, briefly visiting lessons. I evaluated documents, including the school improvement plan and data about the progress of pupils.

Main findings

You have identified the main areas requiring improvement in detail and accurately. Your leadership is very clear and effective. You ensure that actions taken to bring improvement are very well organised and carefully considered. You check carefully that they are achieved. Consequently, at this early stage, aspirations in the school are beginning to rise. Teachers understand better the accountability they have for the progress of each pupil.

The governing body describes the inspection as a 'wake-up call' and accepts that governors were not sharp enough in the past at identifying when things were not as good as they should have been. This has changed quickly. The senior governors I met know the school well and are astute in their analysis. They are rightly supportive of you and the clear improvement agenda you have set, whilst also being able to ask robust questions.

At this early stage since the inspection, you and the governors have made good decisions. But there are two key barriers to further progress. The first is that, as you identify, there is not evidence of a strong culture in the school of developing the quality of teaching. You have confidence in the abilities of the staff but, quite reasonably, see the need for a shift in thinking so that members of staff expect more of the pupils and of themselves. The short visits I made to lessons supported your view that too much teaching is slow paced and insufficiently engaging. You are aware that teachers sometimes talk for too long, without always questioning pupils well or checking that they understand. We observed a lesson together where pupils were colouring in for no apparent learning purpose.

The second barrier is that, whilst you are leading very well, the senior leadership team, as a whole, is not steering the improvements needed. Too much is left to you. The role of the deputy headteacher is significantly underdeveloped. He has the responsibility for organising the school's data about the progress of pupils and managing the regular meetings with each teacher about how well each pupil is doing. However, this data is poorly organised and of little help to teachers in guiding them about what their pupils need to learn next. It does not show clearly enough how well pupils from different groups (such as those with special educational needs or those entitled to free school meals) are doing. Questions I asked about these important matters were not sharply answered. Mathematics is weakly led, and so you have appointed a new leader for the subject, from outside the school, to start work in September.

The data which is available shows that, while there is some improvement in pupils' attainment and progress since the inspection, too many pupils are achieving at a level below where they should be in English and mathematics.

Senior leaders and governors are, so far, taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. However, this is at an early stage and there is much more to do. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that the school has senior leadership structure with the capacity and right expertise to support you in the changes you are correctly making
- develop a culture of improving teaching; ensure higher expectations of pupils and that lessons are brisk, engaging, challenging and thought provoking, so that pupils make faster progress

- improve the school's system for tracking pupils' progress, so that teachers know more clearly what each pupil needs to do to reach the next level.

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

Local authority support, since the inspection, is well focused and you have used it well. Helpfully, the local authority has provided funding for the development of mathematics in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector