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Mrs L Khalil
Headteacher
Heston Primary School
Heston Road
Hounslow
TW5 0QR

Dear Mrs Khalil

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Heston Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 July 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 October 2012. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During the visit, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, other senior staff, governors and representatives of the local authority. I made short visits to lessons across the school with you. I evaluated key documents, including the report from a local authority arranged review (inspection) of the school carried out in May 2013, school plans, minutes of meetings and data showing the progress made by the pupils.

Context

The deputy headteacher, who is responsible for tracking the progress made by pupils, has recently returned to work from maternity leave.

There are a number of staff changes to take place in September; including at senior level. The school has a full complement of staff for the new academic year.

Main findings

This academic year has been a hard one for you and the school. You accept that you may have been deflected from your key leadership tasks (leading the teaching and curriculum) by matters involving the new school building, staffing and the amalgamation of two years ago. You have consistently managed the school effectively from day-to-day but neither I, nor the local authority, have been convinced that you were giving the direction needed to move the school towards becoming good. Your aspirations for the school were vague. The governing body was not effectively challenging the school to move forward. Consequently, as the year has progressed, local authority officers and I have had many difficult and tough discussions with you, and governors, culminating in the local authority's critical review in early May. You have needed challenge from outside the school.

But this has started to change. Your willingness to listen, reflect and take the criticisms on the chin, and then act on them, are now beginning to show fruit. In recent weeks, particularly, you are showing better and clearer leadership, directed in the right areas. The re-organisation of the governing body, and the appointment of a skilled and experienced new Chair in May, alongside the return of the deputy headteacher, has also helped to galvanise change.

Teachers with leadership responsibilities feel better supported and guided. They now know better the key points in the school development plan. They say there is greater clarity, and aspiration, from you about what the teaching in the school needs to be like to ensure all pupils make consistently good progress. To test this, I challenged the music subject leader in depth about raising aspirations in music and she responded very thoughtfully to these questions. It is good to note that a member of staff has responsibility for developing and using the school's lovely grounds and environment for learning. We discussed usefully how the curriculum could be developed further with this in mind.

For the most part, the lessons across the school which we briefly observed together showed the recent improvements in teaching which you and the local authority have noted. The lessons were purposeful and the pupils engaged. There were several examples of different work being given appropriately to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. However, we also saw examples of teaching where pupils were sitting and listening for too long and where staff were doing too much for the pupils rather than allowing them to think and learn for themselves. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children learned and organised themselves independently. It was not clear in all the lessons we observed that these important skills of independence are fully used in older year groups.

The school now has precise, more reliable data about the progress of pupils in English and mathematics across all year groups. School self-evaluation is

increasingly accurate. This is a big improvement from earlier in the year. Overall, the data presents a reasonably positive picture. There is very little evidence of any underachievement in any group or year. However, there are inconsistencies, of which you are aware, and there is more to do to ensure the pupils all make good progress. The deputy headteacher, with other staff, organises this data well and is using it better to show what areas need further work. For example, there is a need to improve progress generally within the current Year 3 cohort and in reading in Year 4. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make slightly better progress than their peers; they are well supported in their learning. Pupils entitled to free school meals achieve as well as their peers.

You, with the governors, have made sensible decisions about staffing for the next academic year. The responsibilities of the two new senior staff have been carefully considered. The governing body, under its new Chair who is well supported by the Vice Chair, has raised its performance considerably since the local authority review. Governors now support and hold you to account robustly, with the Chair now helpfully meeting with you weekly. Governors have organised and received useful training and now make well-focused visits to the school. Minutes of recent governing body meetings show good understanding of the issues the school faces and of firm questioning and challenge. This is a vast improvement in a very short time.

Your key task now, which we discussed in detail, is to ensure that you provide clear leadership and direction to the staff and senior team, so that they, in turn, can bring the improvements for which they are responsible. The local authority expects to provide less support and direction to you next year, as do I. You, the staff and the governors need to show that the school, under its own steam, is able to continue the improvements which have now just begun.

Despite recent improvement, senior leaders and governors have not so far taken effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection. They accept this. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure the headteacher and senior leaders provide clear leadership for the school without requiring the level of external direction that has been needed during this school year
- continue to improve the quality of teaching, in particular by ensuring that pupils work independently and have to think more consistently for themselves, so that all pupils make good progress
- induct new staff, and the new school leaders, quickly, so that they understand what is needed of them and can hit the ground running.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I am likely to inspect the school again in the autumn term and to report publicly on my findings then.

External support

The local authority's support and challenge is consistently well-considered. With me, local authority officers have had to give clear and sometimes very hard messages to the school in this academic year. There is now the evidence that, as a result, you are beginning to take back the initiative. Rightly, the local authority now plans to direct the school less and reduce its support, so that you have the chance to show that the school is now fully self-improving.

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

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector