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Mr David Denchfield
Headteacher
Benhurst Primary School
Benhurst Avenue
Elm Park
Hornchurch
RM12 4QS

Dear Mr Denchfield

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Benhurst Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 22 October 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 second 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.

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:

- increase the proportion of good and better teaching in order to accelerate pupils' progress by more consistently:
 - letting pupils know more clearly the purpose of their learning and how they can show they are making good progress
 - giving pupils work that is more closely matched to the different needs and abilities of pupils in each class
 - ensuring that teachers' questioning is carefully targeted at different pupils in order to check and confirm understanding and also to extend and deepen pupils' thinking

- ensuring that teachers follow an agreed whole school set of principles for teaching.

- increase the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to engage all pupils in learning
- continue to work in partnership with other schools to support teaching and elements of leadership where there are temporary gaps.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, senior leaders, pupils, the Chair, Vice Chair and a member of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. A number of short visits were made to lessons with the headteacher.

Context

You began work as headteacher on 1st September. Four new classroom teachers also began work on 1st September. An assistant headteacher left the school and has not been replaced. Urgent and expensive repairs to the building were needed last term for health and safety reasons.

Main findings

You have made a good start in improving the school. The school's progress to becoming good has stepped up a gear this term. Pupils say that their work is harder and they are pushed more. Better routines are in place in lessons making learning more effective. However, while there is a lot of teaching that is good or better, there remains too much that requires improvement. Common weaknesses in less successful lessons, especially in Years 5 and 6 include:

- a lack of activities tailored to meet the needs of and provide challenge for pupils of different abilities
- teachers not using questioning enough to check that all pupils understand what they are doing and why they are doing it or to develop and extend the understanding of pupils.

On the other hand, in different parts of the school these features are strong elements of lessons. Strong expertise exists in the school. It needs to be spread more widely.

You face the unexpected challenge of finding money from your budget to pay for urgent repairs needed before your arrival. This is a barrier to your school's

improvement, because the money is urgently needed to buy ICT equipment to improve learning and bring lessons alive.

Leadership has improved. Teachers are more accountable through regular and rigorous monitoring. Expectations of the quality of teachers' work are higher and decisions about pay is now matched to those expectations. Senior leaders have effectively led improvements since the last inspection so that Year 6 results in the 2013 national tests showed a considerable improvement on recent years. The strengths of the current leadership team have some gaps following the departure of an assistant headteacher. Plans exist to advertise this post, but in the meantime partnership work with other schools is recommended to strengthen leadership.

Since my last visit there has been an external review of governance commissioned through the National College. This made some suggestions for re-structuring of activities, but disappointingly, provided no written report. Governors have been trained in understanding information about the school's performance and are now better prepared to ask appropriate questions and provide challenge.

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

Since my last visit the local authority has taken action to improve the school's leadership. Links with other schools have been forged and you are being supported in your role as a new headteacher. The local authority will commission a review of the school's provision.

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

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector