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23 October 2013

Mark Miller  
Headteacher  
Robert Blair Primary School  
Brewery Road  
Islington  
London  
N7 9QJ

Dear Mr Miller

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Robert Blair Primary School**

Following my visit to your school on 23 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 first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in June 2013. 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:

- ensure that teachers' marking and feedback provides sufficient challenge for pupils about the next steps they need to take to improve their work.

### **Evidence**

During the visit, I met with you, other school leaders, the Chair and four members of the Governing Body and three representatives of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. I evaluated the school improvement plan and

self-evaluation document. I scrutinised a range of documentation including: records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching, external reviews and attendance data. I looked at a range of pupils' books and visited classes in Key Stages 1 and 2 with you.

## **Context**

Since the last inspection three new teachers have been appointed, including two newly qualified teachers. One teacher has been appointed to a senior leadership post as Lead Practitioner for special educational needs.

## **Main findings**

The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy, has responded quickly and decisively to the areas identified for improvement in the last inspection. They are resolutely focused on continuing to raise achievement, so that is at least in line with, or exceeding the levels expected nationally. Leaders have completed a thorough self-evaluation; they know precisely what needs to improve. The school development plan is sufficiently detailed, with timescales which show an appropriate sense of urgency. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's existing strengths and of the weaknesses which need to be tackled quickly. Expectations of what pupils can and should achieve have been raised. Targets are appropriately ambitious and there is an impressive level of commitment to the pace of improvement from staff at all levels.

Senior leaders closely track the progress that pupils are making. They have a comprehensive tracking system in place, with which they have accurately diagnosed where different groups of pupils need to make more rapid progress. They have carefully analysed provisional data from 2013. While attainment at Key Stage 2 has improved in mathematics and writing, reflecting the impact of work started before the last inspection, leaders have rightly identified that there was a dip in reading and in the phonics screening check. They have also identified that there is variability in progress across year groups. This analysis has been used to improve the quality of teaching and to target additional staffing and resourcing where it is most needed. Teachers are making more effective use of data about pupils' achievement to plan lessons and activities which are well-matched to pupils' different needs. They mark pupils' work regularly and identify what pupils need to do to improve. Occasionally, these next steps do not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for more able pupils.

Leaders have acted quickly to ensure additional resource has been targeted to boost pupils' reading skills. Training for teaching assistants has taken place, so that pupils receive additional supported reading with adults each week. The curriculum has been adjusted so that there is a longer amount of time to deliver phonics sessions.

The strong drive on improving the quality of teaching is resulting in pupils making better progress in lessons and since the last inspection. Leaders carry out regular checks to monitor the quality of teaching through lesson drop-ins, spot checks on pupils' exercise books and careful scrutiny of the achievement of pupils in each teacher's class. They record and monitor this carefully; processes for assessing the performance of teachers are coherent and robust. The 'pupil progress review' meetings provide regular checkpoints to evaluate whether teaching is having the required impact on achievement. Importantly, leaders ensure that support and monitoring is rapidly put into place when improvements in teaching are needed. They follow up quickly to ensure that the necessary changes have taken place. Action plans are sharply focused, with clearly identified support and milestones to drive improvement. Teachers value the support and training they receive and gain from opportunities to learn from one another through peer observation and joint planning.

Supervision arrangements at lunchtime have been strengthened and lunchtime supervisors have received additional training to ensure that the school is a safe place for all pupils when they are out of lessons. Pupils who present more challenging behaviours are well-supported by teaching assistants, during unstructured times of the day. The school has increased the number of lunchtime activities. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to play football, volleyball and to attend the information technology club. The recently introduced house system is motivating pupils to focus on their learning and behave well; they are keen to earn house points in recognition of their successes. The school's inclusion team are tracking pupils' attendance more closely and taking swift action when attendance is identified as a concern. As a result, attendance is continuing to improve.

Governors are strongly focused on ensuring that the school continues to improve. They are providing increasing levels of challenge to senior leaders. They are also evaluating their own performance and its impact.

The school should continue to focus on the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection.

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**

The school has made effective use of external support to bring improvements. The local authority has provided good levels of support and challenge for the headteacher. It has ensured that the school development plan is sharply focused on areas for improvement and that actions are being taken at a swift pace. A local authority consultant has provided clear recommendations for improving pupils'

reading skills; these have been acted upon quickly by senior leaders and pupils are benefitting from additional adult support. The school's improvement advisor has carefully analysed the school's achievement data, which school leaders have used to validate their self-evaluation.

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

Yours sincerely

Russell Bennett  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**