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Sally Osbourne
Thornton Heath Children's Centre
Nursery Road
Thornton Heath
CR7 8RF

Dear Ms Osbourne

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Thornton Heath Children's Centre

Following my visit to your school on 5 November 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 July 2013. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are not taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the last section 5 inspection and plans are not sharply focused on rapidly bringing about improvement.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, a group of parents, and members of the governing body. A phone call was made to a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plans were evaluated. Minutes of governing body meetings, health and safety risk assessments, achievement data and a sample of children's learning profiles were scrutinised. I joined you on a visit to visit the nursery.

Context

Significant staffing changes have occurred since the last inspection. The substantive headteacher remains on long term sick leave. You have been the acting headteacher since July 2013. Other long term absences include a class teacher who is also the special educational needs coordinator, teaching assistants and the school finance officer. Two agency teachers are fulfilling the teaching role for the nursery.

Main findings

You are inexperienced in your new role. You have received insufficient support to enable you to lead the school effectively. Consequently, leadership is limited, as is staffing capacity for strategic or rapid school improvement.

The school improvement plan is not fit for purpose. The plan has not been agreed by the governing body. It does not provide a long-term view; it is for one academic year only. The actions address the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. However, it has too many shortcomings to effectively drive rapid improvement. For example, the timescales in the plan are unrealistic; too many actions identified for completion in the autumn half term have not been achieved. No monitoring and evaluation activity is indicated; insufficient use is made of children's progress data or the expected targets to be achieved by key milestones throughout the year.

Documentation from meeting minutes indicates that the governing body has an operational overview rather than strategic function. The governing body is supportive and committed to the school. However their role in monitoring and evaluating planned actions are under developed - for example in monitoring teaching, learning and children's achievement. A backlog in agreeing policies and procedures is being addressed and inaccuracies in the budget reporting systems have been rectified. Governors have commissioned external audits to check the school's functions in finance, safeguarding and school improvement. This has given them a clearer overview of the current weaknesses in the school's operational systems. However the recommendations have not been acted upon quickly enough.

A safeguarding audit in September 2013 resulted in a number of recommendations. At the time of this visit, some of the concerns identified by the audit remain. These must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

You responded quickly and decisively to the safeguarding incident reported in June 2013. Access to and from the nursery by children, all visitors and parents is now supervised and monitored vigilantly. Parents say that they welcome the immediate changes that were implemented.

Due to staff absences, you have not carried out regular monitoring of the quality of teaching or learning. However, governors report that performance management has

occurred for most staff. You have prioritised professional development for all staff. They have been trained in how to ask more open ended questions. This has helped them to develop children's interests and extend their learning. Informal observations during my visit show that staff are starting to listen more closely to children in group sessions and to model appropriate vocabulary. This was evident when confident children initiated an interaction with an adult but it was less effective with quieter individuals or those with English as an additional language.

Most children showed positive attitudes to their learning. A good relationship with assigned key workers is helping new children and two years olds to settle quickly into the nursery. Planning has been updated since the previous inspection. However it does not use assessment information to indicate the expected learning outcomes of each activity or how it will be adapted to meet children's different needs and abilities. Since the previous inspection, the quality of display has improved but displays do not give a high enough emphasis on promoting children's own reading, writing and number skills.

This monitoring visit has raised concerns about the insufficiency of the actions being taken by the school to address safeguarding recommendations and action planning since the inspection. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure all safeguarding recommendations are addressed as a matter of urgency
- ensure that the action plan includes timescales, targets and rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures that detail how school leaders and governors will check that school actions are making a difference to children's learning and the quality of education.

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 received insufficient support from the local authority to date. The local authority has now undertaken to provide full-time leadership support by the headteacher from a local outstanding nursery school. The local authority will also be writing a statement of the action it will be undertaking as a result of this visit.

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

Yours sincerely

Ann Debono
Her Majesty's Inspector