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Mrs Jenny Pickering
Headteacher
Imperial Avenue Infant School
Imperial Avenue
LE3 1AH

Dear Mrs Pickering

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Imperial Avenue Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 27 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 June 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. The school should take immediate action to:

- ensure that the school improvement plan includes challenging targets against which the progress that all pupils, and groups of pupils across the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage one will be measured
- improve the school's systems for tracking progress so that school leaders and teachers receive regular and clear information about the progress pupils are making
- strengthen leadership in the school by ensuring that the senior leaders take full responsibility for leading improvements to the quality of teaching

- establish a transparent system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching across the school that sharply focuses on the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, other senior leaders, representatives from the governing body and an adviser from the local authority, to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school improvement plan was evaluated. I made short visits to all classes and spoke informally with teachers and pupils. Samples of pupils' work from Years 1 and 2 were scrutinised.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection, two new teachers and two new teaching assistants have been appointed. The Chair of the Governing Body has resigned and a new Chair and Vice-chair have been appointed. School numbers have increased over the last two years and an additional Year 1 class has started in September.

Main findings

School leaders have not acted with enough urgency or decisiveness following the section 5 inspection. You have devised a school improvement plan with support from the local authority. This does address all the issues raised at the last inspection. However, the criteria you have set to monitor the improvements the school needs to make are not challenging enough. The targets for attainment represent a decline in performance from the previous two years. In addition, there are no clear targets set for the progress you expect pupils to make in reading, writing and mathematics across all classes. Because of this, governors are unable to keep a close check on how well the actions you take are improving the progress of different groups of pupils.

The school has been supported by the local authority in providing appropriate training for staff, including teaching assistants. Some of this, for example in literacy, has had a positive impact on the quality and consistency of assessment practice. However, too little has been done to raise expectations and to check on the quality of teaching across the school. Lesson observation records show that you are not focussing enough on the areas for improvement highlighted during the inspection. A regular programme of accurate monitoring and review of teaching practice is not in place. Little work has been done to develop the role of the school's senior leaders in leading improvements in the quality of teaching within their areas of responsibility.

Leaders have prioritised improvements to the quality of teaching and assessment practice in writing. Pupils' work shows that teachers are now setting clear objectives for learning in each lesson and feedback to pupils sharply focuses on this. There have been improvements to the consistency and quality of marking in literacy.

Teachers identify the next steps for pupils and often provide them with opportunities to respond to these. You are aware that the same improvements are not evident in the quality of provision in mathematics.

Governors are committed to the school and are clear about the pace of improvement that is needed. They have undergone an external review and from this have agreed new sub-committees and governors to link directly with school leaders. They recognise that the information they receive does not enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions school leaders are taking to improve the quality of teaching and achievement. Governing body minutes since September show they are asking challenging questions about the data they receive on pupils' progress. They are astute and growing in their confidence and ability to holding senior leaders to account. The new Chair of the Governing body has established links with a neighbouring school and is using this to develop her own expertise.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection. I intend to return to the school next term in order to evaluate the actions leaders are taking to improve the quality of teaching, raise achievement and strengthen school leadership at all levels.

External support

The school has received appropriate support from the local authority in terms of staff training and also regular visits from a designated improvement adviser. Records of these meetings show that the local authority is providing the headteacher with suitable recommendations for next steps. However, the support has not had the impact it could have as school leaders are not monitoring improvements to the quality of teaching effectively enough. The local authority was unaware of the inadequacy of the school improvement plan.

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

Yours sincerely

Philippa Darley
Her Majesty's Inspector