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11 December 2013

Sasha Furze
Headteacher
The Len Wastell Infant School
High Road
Pitsea
SS13 3AB

Dear Mrs Furze

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to The Len Wastell Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 10 December 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 taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- improve the quality and accuracy of pupils' handwriting and spelling.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority to discuss the action taken since the last inspection. The school action plan was evaluated. I also had a tour of the school to observe teachers working with pupils in all classes and looked at the pupils' writing in their books. I also reviewed the latest monitoring reports by yourself, the governing body and local authority related to the performance of the school.

Context

One senior teacher and a class teacher are leaving at the end of this term to be replaced by two new senior teachers at the start of the next. A new leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage started part-way through this term to cover a maternity leave. There are currently two vacancies on the governing body.

Main findings

Through your drive and determination you have quickly begun to tackle the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. The action plan provides you with an effective structure with which to push forward rapid improvement. It specifically identifies who will lead each action, when each should be completed and who will monitor the impact of these actions. The inclusion of specific timescales and targets linked to pupil progress ensures that governors and yourself can measure the progress the school is making and challenge weaker performance in teaching and learning.

You quickly provided the necessary guidance and training for staff to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. Scrutiny of assessment data confirms better rates of pupil progress in these basic skills and a reduction of gaps in achievement for those pupils eligible for a free school meal. The teaching of all pupils in Year 1 and 2 in ability groups, combined with improvements in teaching, has led to this success. Discussions with yourself, talking to pupils and scrutiny of their books, confirms that better marking clearly identifies what pupils have done well and what they need to improve next. The better teaching of the sounds that letters make is seen in improvements in reading. However, despite the amount pupils' write each week increasing, the quality of writing is not. This is because insufficient emphasis is placed on spelling accuracy and the correct formation of letters. Consequently, many pupils in Year 2 are not able to write in a neat joined up style and presentation is untidy. The implementation of a literacy action plan by yourself, in the absence of a subject leader, is tackling some of these weaknesses.

The newly appointed leader for the Early Years Foundation Stage has been quick to identify aspects of provision for children in the Reception classes that need improvement. An action plan is in place to ensure more effective teaching of early literacy skills. This aims to get children off to a better start, especially the boys, through more purposeful learning experiences.

My discussion with two governors and a review of their monitoring confirms that the governing body is developing a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Their recent external review is leading to greater involvement in monitoring the school's work and in asking challenging questions of school leaders.

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 local authority has made several recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the governing body following a thorough review of governance. An improvement board will provide further support and guidance to the governing body at start of the Spring term. Meetings have been held between the improvement officers and yourself. Further support has been commissioned by the local authority to increase the rate of school improvement. I note that you have initiated links with other local schools to support your drive for improvement.

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

Yours sincerely

Philip Mann
Her Majesty's Inspector