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17 January 2014

Mrs Elizabeth Moore
Headteacher
Underhill Infant School
Mays Lane
Barnet
EN5 2LZ

Dear Mrs Moore

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Underhill Infant School

Following my visit to your school on 17 January, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report my findings. 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 October 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 all teachers have an accurate understanding of how well pupils are achieving, by regularly moderating assessments across year groups and classes
- work closely with parents to ensure that attendance levels continue to improve across all year groups
- ensure that the recommendations made in the external review of governance are acted on as soon as possible.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you and other senior leaders, a wider group of staff, two representatives from the local authority and a group of governors to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. A telephone conversation was also held with the Chair of the Governing Body and I joined you on a short tour of the school. The school action plans and other documents were evaluated.

Context

There have been some staffing changes since the inspection. A new class teacher and a year group leader have been appointed from January to fill vacancies caused by retirement or resignation. Further leadership capacity has also been created to allow new or improving teachers to benefit from mentoring and coaching support. The recommended external review of governance has been completed.

Main findings

The school action plan has been reviewed and now shows a clearer understanding of priorities, accurately identifying improvements that need to be made. Clearer milestones, linked to specific outcomes, would help the governing body to judge if improvements are having sufficient impact or happening quickly enough. An action plan for governors is being developed to address this.

Achievement and progress information is now analysed more closely to identify where standards need to be improved. You are aware that inconsistencies remain across classes and subjects, and you are working to address this. Effective systems for analysing information are now shared across the school. Teachers are using this information to plan lessons that take account of every pupil's needs. They now report on the amount of progress being made on a regular basis. You consider that this has started to improve rates of progress and you are able to identify further teaching interventions as necessary. For example, you have correctly identified that teachers need further training to ensure that their assessments are accurate. You are therefore arranging this and plan to provide opportunities for them to moderate assessments across classes and year groups.

Attendance, while still below average, is improving as a result of new strategies that have been applied across the school. More effective monitoring has meant that attendance is better than at the same time last year. However, further work with some parents to help them realise the importance of regular attendance still needs to be done.

The external review of governance has recognised that the governing body needs to be reorganised in order to be fit for purpose. Governors agree that as an organisation, their capacity to play a strong role in the strategic leadership of the school is currently limited. However, they are committed to making a difference and plan to improve the capacity of the governing body by recruiting new members and agreeing clearer roles and responsibilities. This will allow them to hold school leaders to account more robustly. They understand that they must implement the recommendations made in the review as soon as possible so that they can support school leaders in making rapid improvements.

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

You consider that you are now receiving strong support from the local authority and Barnet Partnership for School Improvement. This has included support for improving the quality of numeracy and literacy teaching. Consultants are working with teachers to model good practice and improve planning. They are ensuring that leaders' judgements are accurate and have provided advice on the use of assessment information. Assistance has also been provided to improve the quality of the school self-evaluation and action plans. You have arranged visits to other schools to observe good and outstanding practice in literacy and share systems for tracking rates of pupil progress. You are also part of the London Schools' Excellence Project, working within a local partnership of schools to raise standards in literacy.

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

Yours sincerely

Lesley Cox
Her Majesty's Inspector