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Edris Gaibee
Featherstone Primary School
Glenville Drive
Birmingham
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Dear Mr Gaibee

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Featherstone Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 13 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the 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. 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.

Evidence

During the visit, meetings were held with you, the two assistant headteachers, the Chair and Vice Chair 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. Other documentation considered during this inspection included: your reports to the governors; evaluations of the quality of teaching; data of pupils' progress over time; projected outcomes of tests and teacher assessments; monitoring records; records of action taken by the task force; records of behaviour and attendance; the budget for, and the outcomes of, expenditure for the sport premium; performance management records; revised policies; and progress reports from the headteacher to staff.

Context

Since the last section 5 inspection in November 2013, the deputy headteacher resigned and left the school in December 2013. In January 2013, two teachers were promoted temporarily as assistant headteachers until July.

Main findings

You have taken urgent and decisive action to resolve the weaknesses identified in the previous section 5 inspection. Within 24 hours of the inspection feedback you put together an emergency plan of action to bring about immediate change. Together with an external consultant, you constructed a longer-term plan of action. You have successfully introduced significant change and achieved substantial progress in all of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection. You have identified the immediate priorities and the essential support required to ensure success. All of the initiatives are clearly explained and your expectations of outcomes are equally direct and transparent. Importantly, by establishing working parties made up of teachers, teaching assistants, governors and members of the leadership team, you have ensured that everyone is involved and contributes to the pace of change. By so doing, change is done with staff rather than to them.

Since January this year you have introduced a thorough and detailed approach to improving the quality of teaching. Your expectations of all staff are explicit and checked weekly. Records show that there is a close correlation between your expectations of staff and the published Teacher Standards. In addition, your evaluations regarding the quality of teaching over time are informed by the published handbook for inspection. Training and support has been provided for all staff and some has been tailored to meet specific development needs. In return, staff know that they are accountable for continued and sustainable improvement.

Teachers and teaching assistants receive regular feedback about the quality of their work and they are increasingly encouraged to evaluate themselves using shared criteria. They provide self-evaluations for the quality of their planning, delivery of lessons and the outcomes in terms of the pupils' learning and progress. There is a strong sense of continuous improvement in the school with no hint of complacency. You have already set about revising the initial feedback forms for staff so that challenge continues to be stepped up. Written feedback to teachers is evaluative, clear and uncompromising.

Your observations of lessons and examination of pupils' work in books confirm that you judge the quality of teaching to have improved in advance of the timed target you set. Furthermore, the improvements in teaching correlate with the accelerated progress pupils have made. For example, your targets for pupils' achievements set for April have already been met.

You have capitalised on the expertise and good practice within the school. Teachers have been able to observe each other, share features of good and outstanding teaching and develop their own skills with support. You are careful to identify individual teacher's strengths and expertise and even teachers, relatively new to the profession, have led training events. All staff have been involved in creating a revised teaching and learning policy. The policy focuses clearly on agreed priorities: teachers' subject knowledge, their ability to question, the deployment of teaching assistants, accurate assessments, as well as pupils' progress and behaviour.

You and the staff have introduced a new marking policy in January with explicit expectations. Having introduced the policy you continue to check that everyone implements it accurately. Full evaluations of teachers' application of the policy are provided by leaders and aspects requiring improvement are checked within a week. You have also introduced 'instant development points' where immediate improvement is needed. These regular checks ensure speedy improvements which are consistent with agreed procedures.

Leaders now track pupils' progress twice every half term and all assessments of pupils' achievement are checked to ensure accuracy. Leaders hold progress meetings with teachers to discuss assessments and pupils' rates of progress. Pupils are increasingly aware that their progress is measured in levels. They are encouraged to aspire to improved standards. Examples of writing at different levels are displayed in corridors as a constant reminder of the progress expected of pupils. National Curriculum levels appropriate for different age groups are pasted into pupils' books so they are aware of the necessary skills to adopt. These interventions have helped pupils to realise their learning is on a journey and they are beginning to assess themselves and predict the next steps. Information about children's targets has been sent to parents so they are more able to support and help at home. This information is updated and shared every half term and will be followed up three times a year in parents' meetings. Further support is provided for parents on the school's website.

You are rightly aware that the curriculum forms the vehicle for learning and as such needs to be relevant as well as inspire a 'thirst for knowledge'. Together with the staff you reviewed the curriculum and introduced a new approach. Subject leaders have identified the necessary breadth of knowledge and skills to be taught in any given subject. Teachers' lesson plans are checked and your evaluations have already helped to identify further changes. This cycle of planning, implementing and reviewing is generating new and fresh ideas while helping everyone move closer to the new curriculum in September 2014.

All leaders as well as teachers have a keen sense of accountability. Detailed records are maintained regarding the impact of pupil premium funding. These pupils now demonstrate accelerated progress in response to the additional help they have received. Nevertheless, teachers remain responsible for the progress of all pupils in their class and they are expected to know the nature of the additional support and how it can be further developed in class. The sport premium has been used to

appoint specialist staff, review provision, purchase new resources, assess teachers' skills and provide relevant training.

Governors hold leaders strictly to account. They are focused strongly on the areas for improvement. Following the inspection a task force, including governors, was set up to establish immediate improvements. All reports to governors are expected to focus on measurable improvement or impact. Governors prepare questions in advance of meetings to ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly understood and individuals are held to account. Governors visit the school regularly and monitor aspects of the school's work. There is a high level of relevant expertise within the governing body. No one is complacent and they are considering an audit of governors' skills to ensure their own journey of improvement.

Your reports to governors clearly map out priorities for development and how they will be implemented and monitored. Teachers are beginning to present developments in each area of the curriculum or specialism. Governors request measurable evidence that each initiative has led to improvement. Each week you report to staff to keep them up to date about new and on-going initiatives regarding curriculum subjects, expectations, reminders for acceptable implementation and examples of good practice. As a consequence, staff are constantly reminded of their role and responsibility in achieving success.

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 representative has visited the school on a number of occasions since the section 5 inspection. Training has been provided to better understand the process of getting moving from Required Improvement to good. The local authority has also recommended another school which will be able to provide on-going support.

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

Yours sincerely

Deana Holdaway
Her Majesty's Inspector