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Ms Mandy Boutwood
Headteacher
Harbinger Primary School
Cahir Street
London
E14 3QP

Dear Ms Boutwood

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Harbinger Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 21 May 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 January 2014. 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, I met with you, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, two other governors and a representative of the local authority, to discuss the action you have taken since the last inspection. I evaluated recent information about pupils' achievement and your records of monitoring the quality of teaching. We visited all of the classrooms and the Early Years Foundation Unit, where we looked at how well pupils are learning. We scrutinised the quality of work in pupils' English and mathematics books. I met with a group of pupils and talked with them about their learning. I examined minutes of governing body and senior leadership team meetings and evaluated the impact of the school's post-inspection action plan.

Context

Since the inspection, two teachers from Year 2 and 4 have both begun their maternity leave. You are covering these classes with teachers from supply agencies. Additionally a number of other teachers and support staff will be leaving the school at the end of the summer term to take up new positions elsewhere or begin their maternity leave. You have appointed three new teachers for the autumn term. Currently you are recruiting two teaching assistants to provide support for three pupils who have statements of special educational needs. The governing body has been strengthened by the appointment of a local authority governor.

Main findings

Training provided within school is having a good impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. The work set for pupils that are more able, offers them a greater level of challenge. Teachers' lesson plans identify more specifically how work will be set to meet the various abilities of the pupils in each class. The pupils that I met with told me that they are expected to work hard. They like the 'WMG writing' strategy (What Makes Good writing) and find this a helpful prompt when they are trying to improve their work.

We looked at pupils' books, and it was apparent that in some classes, pupils get good feedback about their work and what they need to do to improve it. This is however, an inconsistent picture and you are aware this is an urgent priority. In some classes, exercise books showed that teachers were not paying enough attention to the quality of pupils' work and their presentation. In these classes, the teacher's expectations are not high enough and pupils present work of which they are not proud.

We observed that nearly all teaching assistants are having a beneficial impact in the classroom. You have implemented a more robust system for observing and evaluating the impact and quality of their work. Teaching assistants receive valuable feedback following observations. The feedback identifies the strengths of their work with pupils, and what needs to be done to improve it. The training that they received on delivering high quality guided reading sessions, is leading to good practice in many classrooms.

The most recent assessments indicate that there is still variability in the progress made by pupils in different year groups and in different subjects. Pupils in Year 6 are making good progress. However, teachers' own assessments indicate that results this year are likely to be no higher than those from last year, but could be significantly lower in writing. School data indicates that pupils are not making adequate progress in Years 3 and 4. Progress needs to accelerate so that attainment rises by 2015. Low attainment remains a significant barrier in your journey to becoming a good school.

Teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Unit is good. Pupils get off to a great start because of well-planned and highly organised learning opportunities. As a result, the proportion of children likely to achieve a Good Level of Development is set to more than double from last year; increasing from 20 percent to just over 50 percent.

There is a straightforward short-term action plan, which sets clear milestones for improvement. You are monitoring these improvements and the quality of teaching and learning extremely closely. You use your assessments to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving, as well as those teachers who need to improve the quality of their work. Middle leaders are taking greater responsibility for improving the quality of teaching in their respective year groups throughout the school.

The governing body knows the school well. The Chair of the Governing Body values training for new and experienced governors, and is undertaking a governor skills audit to ensure that a good mix of expertise is available to the school. Governors have developed a useful action plan, which links to the school's priorities. The minutes of meetings leave me in no doubt about the rigour with which governors hold you and other leaders to account for improvement.

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 knows your school well. Since the inspection, the local authority has recognised that the school is a cause for concern. Consequently, you now receive more support than you previously did. A monitoring board called the Targeted Intervention Group is soon to meet, which will be made up of school leaders, local authority officers and governors. This group will ensure that you hold each other to account for actions and the pace of improvement. Local authority officers are visiting the school more frequently and providing hands-on support to improve and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. Their reports identify what is going well but also what needs to improve. School leaders and governors say that they are getting good support from the local authority and I agree.

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

Yours sincerely

Adam Higgins
Her Majesty's Inspector