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Rebecca Collins
Headteacher
Priors Wood Primary School
Cozens Road
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG12 7HZ

Dear Mrs Collins

Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to Priors Wood Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 5 June 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection 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 February 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. The school should take further action to:

- strengthen the success criteria, targets, and monitoring and evaluation arrangements in the action plan
- by the end of term, evaluate the impact of actions taken since the previous inspection so that priorities for the next academic year are securely based and targeted on the findings.

Evidence

During the inspection, meetings were held with you, the deputy headteacher, the leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the leader for literacy and special educational needs, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the School

Improvement Partner to discuss the action taken since the previous inspection. The school development plan was evaluated.

Context

There have been no changes in staffing or the governing body since the previous inspection. There will be several changes for September. Two teachers and a teaching assistant will leave in July. Two new parent governors and an associate governor will join the governing body.

Main findings

Senior leaders, the governing body and the local authority adviser agree that the inspection came too soon to show enough improvement in the school's work since the new headteacher put in place the things that needed to be done. Since then, the journey of improvement has continued with determination. The school development plan was amended to take account of the inspection findings, not to change direction but appropriately to strengthen the work already started. It focuses on the right priorities and is suitably supported by senior leaders' separate action plans. It would benefit from tighter measurements for success, and by responsibilities for the actions, monitoring and evaluation each being done by a different person. In addition, you have too much to do in the plan, which reduces opportunities for others to take greater responsibility or for you to focus on the impact and quality of the actions taken.

A lot of monitoring has taken place to look at the quality of teaching and pupils' learning since the inspection. This gives leaders and governors important details about what is taking place but the information is not yet pulled together to make clear, strategic judgements about how well pupils are doing or to pinpoint where the strengths and weaknesses lie. Nevertheless, leaders' monitoring suggests that teaching has improved since the inspection. Teachers now provide pupils with opportunities to be more active in their learning, including responding to the next steps suggested in teachers' marking of their work and using resources and prompts to show what they have learned, without relying too much on adults to help them. Checking on the contribution of teaching assistants on pupils' learning and providing training is changing the way that pupils are supported in class. Similarly, pupils' experiences at breaktimes have improved as a result of direct work with staff to change what they do.

Governors actively play their part in checking the school's work. They seek their own, first-hand evidence and staff are happy to show and explain their work to governors. Governors have completed training to improve their understanding of data. The Chair of the Governing Body values the support of a Local Leader of Governance and recent training on being an effective Chair was useful in reflecting on current practice. A review of governance, as recommended in the inspection report, took place soon after the inspection but was not found to be useful.

Parents want to keep informed about the work being done in response to the inspection and the letter from you and the Chair of the Governing Body that accompanied the inspection report encouraged them to contribute their views. Since then, parents have taken advantage of opportunities to come into school to see for themselves how some of the changes are taking shape. The governing body will formally seek their views later this term to inform future plans. You will do the same with pupils and staff.

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

Senior staff appreciate the support from local authority advisers. Since the inspection, staff have benefited from the challenge and support from consultants for literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology, the Early Years Foundation Stage and from the School Improvement Partner. The local authority has recently brokered support for you from a Local Leader of Education and this will start later this month. The governing body are generally appreciative of training from the local authority since the inspection, particularly about understanding data and for the role of the Chair. However, they have expressed their disappointment about the quality for the review of governance because it relied too heavily on governors' own evaluations and records of meetings, rather than on challenging the quality of their work.

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

Yours sincerely

Heather Yaxley
Her Majesty's Inspector